

IV/2005

# NISHAAN

NAGAARA



Music & Spirituality  
Gurmat Sangeet  
Jori: A Historical Overview  
Distinction of the Rabab



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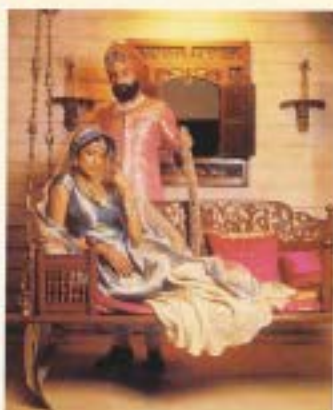
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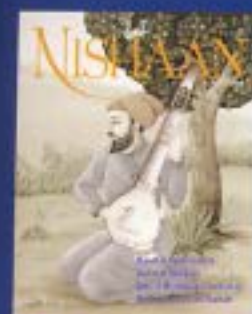
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## Music and spirituality

Music cannot be defined; it can only be received and responded to. Many of us ignorantly consider it a form of merry amusement but it is not mere entertainment. It is, in fact, the vehicle of cosmic immanence. It takes us out of the actual and whispers to us those mysteries that startle our wonder as to who we are and for what we exist. Through music we become connected to a larger force and feel immersed in an exhaustive magnetic field that gently pulls us towards its core. It is thus that we get excluded from this world and attain citizenship of the cosmos.

Whence has the energy of music come? The One Formless (*Nirankar*) who is the source of all forms, the One Nameless (*Anam*) who is the source of all names, is also the essence of all music. The pronouncement (*kuvaoo*) with which He set the process of Creation into motion was nothing other than a musical emanation. It is with the gush of this primal tone that He turned on the inexhaustible flow of that subtle, ambrosial sweetness that pleases our ears and satiates our souls. It still continues to sustain the unremitting play of Divine Creativity. Music stands as the most immediate, most sublime and most vivacious embodiment of the primal vibrant harmony. It can still be heard by a soul that soars above the deafening din of the chaotic world.

Guru Nanak's was an immensely receptive soul that could receive these harmonious intimations from the littlest things in existence. He perceived the entire Creation humming with primal, generative, music. This is how he records it in one of his celebrated songs, the *Sodar*:

Countless Your singers, symphonies, galore;  
Countless Your instruments, songsters untold.  
*Ragas* and *Raginis* carol and chant,  
Countless minstrels choirs perform.

Sing Your hymns Fire, Water and Wind.  
*Dharma Raja* at Your Gate doth sing,  
Praise Thee scribes of the deeds of man,  
Whose script-scrolls does *Dharma Raja* scan.  
*Ishwar* and *Brahma*, whom You decorate,  
Along with their *Devis*, orchestrate.  
Sings *Indra* from his heavenly seat.  
Other godlings his tunes repeat  
*Siddhas*, they praise You in meditation.  
Sages they sing in contemplation  
Sing celibates and sing true-hearts,  
Heroes and scholars and heavenly squads.  
Laud You *Vedas*, sing You *Ages*  
Sing Your praises saints and sages.  
Sing Your praises charming maids  
Out of heaven and earth and Hades.  
Sing Your jewels and gems You made,  
Sing holy places sixty-eight,  
Heroes, whom not a soul can daunt,  
And warriors, Your carols chant.  
Sing Four Realms of beings who breed  
(From egg or womb or sweat or seed).  
Laud You Regions, Spheres of old,  
Universes who You uphold.  
(Muse after muse and song after song  
to your towering mansion throng).  
Dyed in Your Love (and drenched in Your wine),  
Sing You poets beholden Thine.  
So many more Your Name exalt,  
Nanak, but, recollects them not.  
(Japu ji: Pauri 27)



It is not obvious from this verse that the entire existence as one corporate body and every element thereof individually, is replete with divine music?

Edifying music emerges from the subtle string of the cosmic instrument and weaves that wonderful melody which turns all ugliness into beauty, all discordance into harmony and wafts the human soul into those spheres where all experience appears ineffable. Words fail to describe it, arithmetic laments its importance and senses feel altogether disabled. *Kirtan* is the designation that has been given to such music that arises out of the union between human soul and the infinite spirit of the universe. Bhakta Namadev says, "Whenever I behold my Lord, I get inspired to sing His praises. Then, I, His humble servant, attain to immense peace" (SGGS p.656).

Devotional music is a genre dedicated to the Presence that itself enlivens its *tāla* (rhythm), sweetens its *nāda* (sound), mellows its *rāga* (musical mode), and consecrates its *shabd* (word). The love and longings of a devotee make this Presence the centre of his devotion.

Devotion elevates music beyond a mere system of physical energetics. Then music does not remain just harmonic sounds or hymnified emotions. Devotion is invariably accompanied by self-surrender. Where self-surrender has not awakened, devotion cannot stir. Guru Amar Das observes, "The *gurmukh* surrenders his sense of self, and sings the praise of God. So he obtains honour in the Court of the Lord" (SGGS p.910).

Devotion is often identified with intense love, or with prayer, or with religious sentiment. However, it is none of these in the ordinary sense. It is not love as such, but its energetic core that turns imagined affection into vibrant, inspired verity. It is not just prayer, but the invigorating spirit that underlies its plaintive utterances. Only when it touches a prayer, does the prayer becomes meaningful. It is not even worship, for if it is absent, worship becomes mere hypocrisy.

The object of spirituality is attainment of union with *Paramātman*, the Supreme Soul. This union unfolds such qualities as are essential attributes of joy: infinity as opposed to negativity of separateness.

Meeting God is meeting with His music first. His music, in the spiritual lore, is called *Anāhat Nād* or *Anhad Nād*. It figures variously in Sri Guru Granth Sahib as *anhad shabd*, *anāhad-tūrā*, *anhad vāje*, *anhad-jhunkār*, *anahad bāni*, *anhad-dhuni* etc. The term *anāhat*, in Sanskrit means 'un-struck'. In Pali, it stands for 'pure or immaculate' and in Prakrit, for 'eternal'. The suffix words: *shabd*, *tura*, *vaje*, *jhunkar*, *bani*, and *dhuni* stand for 'word', 'sound of horn', 'musical instrument', 'tinkling sound', 'vocal sound', and 'musical sound' respectively. All these pertain to aspects of Divine Music. Master musicians like Beethoven felt that music provided 'the bridge between heaven and earth, between spiritual life and sensual life'.

It is not that music is too imprecise for words. It is too precise. Yet, music often blends with poetry to hymn Divine Glory. Though beyond words, music, when it touches the words, enlivens them. Whenever a spiritually inspired soul soars towards the heavens, it almost always, becomes a song.

Guru Nanak used two epithets for himself in his words: *Dhadhi* (ਢਾਢੀ) and *Shair* (ਸ਼ਾਇਰ). The former means a minstrel or a musician and the latter, a poet. He was not only a superb poet, he was also an exquisite singer. His biographers have testified that whenever he sang (with Mardana accompanying him on his rebec) those in audience became spellbound and his message pierced into their souls. He himself says: "Intoxicated with celestial bliss, and imbued with the Lord's love, I sing the praises of the Glory of my True One!" (SGGS p.634) and proclaimed that "Kirtan is the most exalted way that leads to the Lord in this Dark Age" (SGGS p.1075).

In this Issue of the *Nishaan* that is now in your hands, *Gurbani Sangeet* finds a special place.

A devout Sikh greets his Waheguru by chanting His Naam and singing His *kirtan*. ❧



# Gurmat Sangeet

Reprinted by reader requests, from Nishaan's Issue I/2000.

The importance of music as a vehicle of religious thought and its meaningfulness and efficacy in transforming the human mind and soul, is nowhere as predominant, in fact primary, as in the Sikh way of life.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the embodiment of *Baani*, the *Shabad*, is divided into chapters under the headings of thirty one *raags*. Only the *Jap Ji Sahib*, in the beginning, and the *Mundavani* at the close, are two compositions which are not written under the heading of any particular *raag*. The rest of the holy Granth Sahib is compiled under *raag* indications. This is significant and purposeful, with a serious intent behind it.

In the Sikh way of life, *Gurbani* – the Sikh Scriptures, *Shabad*, the word spoken or written – has a special and revered place. Just as in ancient Indian thought *Nand* is *Brahm*, in Sikh theology *Shabad* is *Guru* and *Guru* is *Shabad*. Consequently *Shabad Keertan* (singing of Sikh hymns), in the manner bestowed by the Gurus and practiced traditionally, is the sole form of

worship given in the Sikh *Maryada*. It is this *Ang*, this fusion of *Shabad* (hymn) *raag* and *taal* that we call *Gurmat Sangeet*.

The Sikh religion, coming into being in the 15th-16th centuries in northern India, encompassed all aspects of man as a social being. It was a socio-politicum-economic regeneration which imbibed in itself the most humane and best of the then existing elements of various religious thoughts. From them was recast a composite concept of the Divine Being (God) in relation to man and his spirit, totally in harmony with the cosmos, as a manifestation of Divinity, to be realised on the socio-economic and cultural plane – a concept of redemption through noble living without the precept of a "hereafter" or "day of judgement", or a "heaven" or a "hell" for reward or retribution. The Sikh religion as such did not accept divinity in the mould of the existing religio-philosophic thought, nor did it subscribe to ritual and the existing forms of worship, deeming them as idle and not compatible with the evolved man and his rationalism. It had to break with the blind faith of emotion-dominated non-scientific human limitations which compelled him to submit to various idols representing the phenomena of nature, elements of the universe and super humans contrived from myths and mythology. In the new thought, Divinity became at once personal, finite and infinite, the timelessness and the ultimate, for which the spirit of man could, and should, aspire.

In the opening stanza of *Jap Ji Sahib*, Guru Nanak Dev, after outlining that neither cogitation nor silence,

"despise a world which does not feel that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy,"

Beethoven



The Saranda, created by Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib.





*Guru Nanak Dev with his faithful disciples Mardana (with rabaab) and Bala.*

nor penance nor intellectual interpolation can help man attain Divine acceptability (*Sachiaaraa*), raised the question as to how "His divine approval" (*Sachiaaraa*), can be obtained and states the fundamental postulate:

**ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥**

*Kiv sachiaaraa hoena,*

*Kiv koorhay tutay paal*

To which the answer given is:

**ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਾਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਲਭੈ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਲਲਿ ॥**

*Hukam rajaaee chalnaa*

*Nanak likhinaa naal.*

But then how to acquire the state where one can live under the DIVINE WILL (*Hukam Rajaaee*) : the solution is given in the 5th Paurhee:

**ਗਾਵੀਐ ਸੁਣੀਐ ਮਨਿ ਰਖੀਐ ਭਾਉ ॥**

*Gaaveey suneey*

*Man rakheeay bhaao*

"Sing His praises, listen to them and feel His presence."

According to the legend (*Saakhi*), whenever Guru Nanak wished to communicate his divine message, he would ask Bhai Mardana, his companion, to play the rabaab as the Divine message (*Baani*) had come. Thus evolved *Gurmat Sangeet*, *Shabad Keertan* of the Sikh tradition, with the Great Guru as the singer and Mardana the *rabaabi*, the first accompanist.

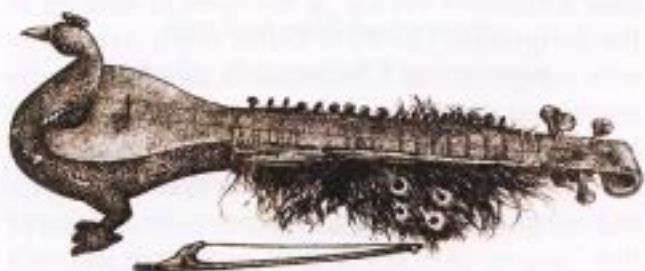
Singing of the Scriptures (*Baani*) in proper music form is perhaps the easiest way to bring the

individual being into harmony with the Creator and the wonders of His created Nature (*Qudrat*). Such music (*Shabad Keertan*) in Sikh parlance is called *Gurmat Sangeet*.

Founders of the Sikh movement took to music and poetry as the most effective and efficient vehicles of communication of the Word (*Shabad*) and "His Experience". The Word (*Shabad*) is the Message Divine (*Baani*) and thus the Guru. It conveys eternal knowledge (*Gian*) and spiritual experience and rapturous thoughts which are at once mystic and ecstatic.

In Indian mythology, Saraswati (the Goddess of knowledge and art) is said to have created music when she could not satisfactorily communicate her spiritual experience and knowledge through words. She subscribed to the use of 'Sound Absolutes' (*Nad Brahm*). Hence was conveyed experience without translating it into the language form. The limitation form of words and language were thus surpassed. This however had its own limitations. Experience communicated as nascent experience without word cannot be effective on the plane of rationality. The Sikh way of a life, and thought, depends and operates on the plane of the rational, so resorting to the absolute form of communication however noble could not fit into the dynamic concept of emancipation and redemption through knowledge and action of man as a social being.

*Shabad Keertan*, that is, the words (*Shabad*) set to *raag* and rhythm, embodies the "experience-communicating" ability of singing, "objectified emotion" character of *raag*, the infinite concept" concept of *taal* (rhythm cycle) and the purposeful, meaningful and rationalisable and easily understandable character of *baani* (Scripture) in the form of *shabad*. Verse and music, when brought together, create beauty and sweetness and generate a



*Taaos, successor to the Saranda.*



power that by-passes the critical and calculative check barriers of intellect. This accesses the consciousness and lifts it into ecstasies and fills it with profound devotion and love, thereby bringing the listener into direct contact with the Eternal.

In Sikh theology the God-head is perceived as Timeless (*Akaal*) and Formless (*Nirankaar*) Supreme Being; the Eternal truth (*Sat*), which is both absolute and Immanent, One and the Many manifest *Ek-Onkar*. Word (*shabad*) is the Guru and the Guru is the Enlightener, Instructor, who shows the path and puts the mortal in direct communication with the Supreme Being. Thus praises of the lord are sung only in the *Baani*, as *Shabads* revealed by the Gurus. Beside



*Bhai Avtar Singh, exponent of true tradition in Shabad Keertan.*

spiritual enlightenment, the Sikh scripture imparts guidance as to how the human span of life has to be faithfully and successfully lived so that it receives divine approval, here and hereafter.

The entire structure of Sikh religious thought and practice is based on the concept of a formless being and consequently the Sikh worship form also uses a formless vehicle in the form of singing of the Scriptures. The Fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev who compiled the *Guru Granth Sahib* and who established the practice of singing of scriptures at the Harmandir in Amritsar as the sole form of worship, states that after evaluating various prevalent forms and means of reaching the ultimate, he concluded that "singing of God's praises" is the best and only form of effective worship and thus acceptable in the Sikh religion.

ਪਾਨੁ ਪੜਿਓ ਅਰੁ ਥੇਦੁ ਬੀਚਾਰਿਓ ਤਿਲਿ ਸੁਆਗਮ ਸਾਧੇ ॥  
ਪੈਚ ਜਨਾ ਸਿਉ ਸੰਗੁ ਨ ਛੁਟਕਿਓ ਅਧਿਕ ਅਹੰ ਬੁਧਿ ਬਾਧੇ ॥

*I read the holy texts and dwelt on the Vedas, and  
Controlled my breath and cleansed my inner system,  
But I abandoned not the Society of five (desires) and  
Was bound to egohood more and more.*

ਪਿਆਰੇ ਇਨ ਬਿਧਿ ਮਿਲਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਈ ਮੈ ਕੀਏ ਕਰਮ ਅਣੇਕਾ ॥  
ਹਰਿ ਪਰਿਓ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਕੈ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਦੀਜੈ ਬੁਧਿ ਬਿਬੇਕਾ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

*O dear! These are not the ways to meet God,  
I tried any number of them.  
So, prostrate at the Master's Door and pray  
"O God, Bless me with a Discriminating Intellect (Pause).*

ਮੇਨਿ ਭਇਓ ਕਰਪਾਤੀ ਰਹਿਓ ਲਾਨ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਬਣਾਹੀ ॥  
ਤਟ ਤੀਰਥ ਸਭ ਧਰਤੀ ਭ੍ਰਮਿਓ ਦਬਿਧਾ ਛੁਟਕੈ ਨਹੀ ॥

*I abide in silence and made of my hands the bowl, and  
Wandered naked through the woods,  
And I visited all the pilgrim places and river banks,  
Yes, the whole earth; but the sense of duality stuck on*

ਮਨ ਕਮਲ ਤੀਰਥ ਜਾਇ ਬਸਿਓ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਵਤ ਧਰਾਏ ॥  
ਮਨ ਕੀ ਮੈਲੁ ਨ ਉਤਰੈ ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਜੇ ਲਖ ਜਰਨ ਕਰਾਏ ॥

*My mind's cravings led me to abide at holy places;  
Yes, I chose to be seen alive  
But my mind's scum was not cleansed thus,  
Howsoever I tried.*

ਕਲਿਕ ਕਮਿਲੀ ਹੈਵਰ ਗੈਵਰ ਬੁਧਿ ਦਾਨੁ ਦਾਰਾ ॥  
ਅੰਨਬਸਕੁ ਭੁਮਿ ਬਹੁ ਅਰਾਧੇ ਨਾ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਹਰਿ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥

*I gifted away gold, women and horses and elephants  
To be acclaimed a man of charity.  
Yea, I offered in alms food, clothes, and land  
But did not get to the Lord's Door.*

ਪੂਜਾ ਅਰਚਾ ਬੈਠਨ ਡੰਡਰਿਤ ਖਟੁ ਕਰਮਾ ਰਹੁ ਰਹਤਾ ॥  
ਹਉ ਹਉ ਕਰਤ ਬੰਧਨਮਹਿ ਪਰਿਆ ਨਾ ਮਿਲੀਐ ਇਹ ਸੁਗਤਾ ॥

*I performed worship, and made flower-offerings  
(to the Gods)*

*Yea, I prostrated like a log and performed six kinds of actions.*

*But I was tied to myself and attuned not to my God  
This way too.*

ਜੋਗ ਸਿਧ ਆਸਣ ਚਰਿਤਸੀਹ ਏ ਭੀ ਕਰਿ ਕਰਿ ਰਹਿਆ ॥  
ਢੰਡੀ ਅਚਲਾ ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਜਲੀ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਸੈਗੁ ਨ ਰਹਿਆ ॥

*I practiced Yoga, like a Siddha, and all the eighty four  
Postures and achieved longevity,  
But met not the Lord  
And kept on taking birth over and over again.*

ਰਾਜ ਲੀਲਾ ਰਾਜਨਕੀ ਰਚਨਾ ਕਰਿਆ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਅਵਾਰਾ ॥  
ਸੋਜ ਸੋਹਨੀ ਦੰਦਨ ਚੋਆ ਲਾਕ ਘੋਰ ਕਾ ਦੁਆਰਾ ॥

*I ruled over lands and indulged in regal pleasures, and  
Swelled by ego, I issued commands.  
Slept on luxurious beds perfumed with sandalwood scent,  
But fell into hell at the end.*

ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਸਾਧਸੰਗਤਿ ਹੈ ਸਿਰਿ ਕਰਮਨਕੈ ਕਰਮਾ ॥  
ਕਹੁ ਲਾਕ ਰਿਸੁ ਭਇਓ ਪਰਪਤਿ ਜਿਸੁ ਪੁਰਖ ਲਿਖੇ ਕਾ ਲਹਲਾ ॥

*The highest deed is singing of the Lord's Praises in the  
Company of the Guru in the Bani (Sadh Sangat).  
Sayeth Nanak: He alone attains it in whose lot it is so  
Writ by God.*

ਤੋਰੇ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਇਹ ਗੋਗਿ ਮਤਾ ॥  
ਭਇਓ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲੁ ਦੀਨ ਦੁਖ ਭੰਜਨੁਹਰਿ  
ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਇਹੁ ਮਨੁਰਾਤਾ ॥ ਰਹਉ ਦੂਜਾ ॥

(ਸੋਰਠਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਪੰ: ੬੪੧)

*Thy Servant, O Lord! Is imbued thus with thy Love, And  
Thou art kind to him, and he sorrows no more,  
Inebriated with Singing thy Praise. (Second Pause)  
(Sorath M.5 Page: 641)*

In raag Bilawal, the Guru says:

ਜਰੁ ਸੰਜਮ ਤੀਰਥ ਚਿਲਾ ਜੁਗਾ ਕਾ ਧਰਮੁ ਹੈ ਕਲਿ ਮਹਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਰਹਿਨਾਮਾ ॥

*Celibacy, self-discipline and pilgrimages  
Are the faiths of those ages*

*In the dark ages (Kal i.e. the present) glorification  
Of Lord's name is the only righteous deed*

It is again reiterated:

ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮ ਪਖੰਡ ਜੋ ਦੀਸਹਿ ਤਿਨਜਮੁ ਜਾਗਾਤੀ ਲੂਟੈ ॥  
ਨਿਰਾਥਾ ਕੀਰਤ ਨੁਗਾਵਹੁ ਕਰਤੇ ਕਾ ਨਿਮਖ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਜਿਹੁ ਛੂਟੈ ॥  
(ਸੁਹੀ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ਪੰ: ੪੭੮੭ ॥)

*The rituals, religious rites and hypocrisies which are seen,*

*Them plunders yama, the tax gatherer  
Sing thou the pure praise of the Creator,  
Contemplating whom even for a moment  
Thou shalt be emancipated  
(Suhi M.5 Page:4797)*

For Sikhs, worship is not a passive adoration. It is a masculine subscription of the human being (Purakh), towards (Akal Purakh) whom he holds up high. It is the devotion of a liberated man who does not stoop. His songs are not an appeal to the sensual alone by being just lyrical. His singing portrays love, so it should be sweet, that is musical. But this is the spritual love, the pure one. His songs must have a deep sense of longing (Birhaa) in the sense perceived in Indian classical music and not the bemoanings of modern day singing. This longing (Birhaa), the yearning of the invidual soul for the universal soul (Divinity) from which it has been separated, is the essence and essence of relationship of man with God and a key element of the Sikh prayer and worship. This longing for the Akaal Purakh is to be kindled within the individual by singing (Keertan) of the Word (Shabad);

ਬਿਰਹਾ ਬਿਰਹਾ ਅਖੀਐ ਬਿਰਹਾ ਰੂ ਸਲਤਨਤੁ ॥  
ਫਰੀਦਾ ਜਿਹੁ ਤਨਿਬਿਰਹੁ ਨਹਿਪਸੈ ਸੋ ਰੁਨੁ ਜਾਤੁ ਮਸਾਨੁ ॥

*Men talk of the Lord's love and its pang  
O, the Lord's pang, thou art the monarch of all,  
Farida, the body, in which the Lord's love swells up not,  
Deem that body to be the cremation ground  
He who loves, attains the Lord*



Good music, even without words, must have a thought content, only then it enobles the Spirit, tranquilises and purgates the self in the Aristotelian sense of purgation. It is, therefore, essential that the composition of song must be capable of ennobling, or at least communicating chaste sensibilities. The sensibility of the 'composition' (*Reet*) and the style of singing must therefore be complementary to the 'intent' (*Bhaav* – meaning, *Arth*) of the 'words' (*Shabad*). In Gurbani, we read about '*Sahaj Dhun*'.

The Sikh *Keertan* not only takes this aspect of art into consideration but also goes one step further. It combines the beat (*Taal*), tempo (*Laiy*), the poetic meter and even structure of the poetry with structure of the classical Indian music.

The beat (*Taal*) is defined in many of the *Shabads* and mentioned as '*Ghar*'. The *Shabad* construction and meter of the poetry is so set up that the pattern of the 'beat' does not break up the sentence construction. In fact it accentuates its thought content. The '*Ghar*' concept is indicative thereof and the '*Partaal*' *shabads* are the speciality of this aspect.

Then there is the Pause (*Rahao*) in the *Shabad*. Almost all *Shabads* have the indicator '*Rahao*' mentioned after one of its sentences. This is significant. The aesthetes in Indian musicology define the structure of a composition (especially in traditional *Dhrupad* style) as consisting of *Asthai* or the burden, the *Antraa*, the *Sanchari* and the *Abhogh*, interpreted as thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis and limitation or '*ambit*' or limitation, or the *raag* respectively. This very definition lifts the art of Indian music on to the plane of the sublime. Like all great arts it becomes the resolution of the paradox. The Sikh poetic scriptures too being sublime in nature, the initiators of the *Shabad Keertan* concept structured their poetry and their singing in such manner that it completely fits into this pattern and becomes ennobling and effective.

It is an established principle in *Keertan* that the sentence before the pause (*Rahao*) is required to be sung as the *Asthai* or the burden. It is so because this sentence, the *tuk*, always contained the gist of the thought content of the *Shabad*, the hymn. Also the sentence after the pause (*Rahao*) elaborates, explains, puts forth and explains the other aspect of thought like the *Antra*. Thus the whole concept is of an integrated approach of thought (*bhaav*), emotion,

(*geet*) and the beat (*taal*), the flux of time in one inseparable whole.

Such is the importance of music and *raags* in *Gurmat Sangeet*, that the entire Sri Guru Granth Sahib is divided into chapters headed under the names of 31 *raags* of the Indian classical musical traditions. Beginning with *Sri rang* and ending with *Jaijaiwanti*, all compositions have the title or *raag* appended to it, signifying the *raag* in which the stanza was first composed and desired to be sung by the Gurus.

*Keertan* envelopes the personality on the sensual plane in melody, on the intellectual plane in rationale of the message of the scripture, the *Baani* and on the emotional plane in the nobility and catholicity of Indian classical music. Thus the experience becomes total, and the longing (*Birhaa*) links the One with the Ultimate. This worship thus is total involvement of the experiencing of His Creation on all planes; described in Gurbani, the experience of His presence thus becomes total".

Music is a moral law.  
It gives soul to the  
universe, wings to  
the mind, flight to  
the imagination, and  
charm and gaiety to  
the life and everything.  
Plato

ਅਖੀ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੰਨੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਮੁਖਿ ਅਖਨੁ ਸਚੁ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

Whosoever sees the Lord's omnipresence  
With his eyes, hears the Guru's word  
With his ears, and utters the True Name  
With his mouth.

He attains the full wealth of honour  
And his attention is fixed on the Lord.

Thus when Hymns (*Shabads*) are rendered to purely sensual, erotic type of tunes, not only the aesthetics but the very purpose, sanctity, and the sacramony of worship is violated in most abject manner.

The Guru says:

ਮੇਰੇ ਮੇਰਨ ਸੁਣਕੇ ਇਹ ਨ ਸੁਣਾਏ ॥  
ਸਾਕਤ ਗੀਤ ਨਾਦੁ ਧੁਨਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਬੈਲਤ ਬੈਲ ਅਜਾਏ ॥

"Oh my beloved! Let me not hear the heretic degrades who  
sing tunes and songs but speak unbecoming language".

The singing of the *Shabad* is not to subordinate the Word with the music. The Sikh *Keertan* has to be a judicious combination of them, with one end grounded on the earth and the other soaring high towards heaven and Infinity. It is the Word that must dominate. It is the spiritual aspect which is glorified so that the mind gets attuned with the Will of the Master and transcends into a state of peace and bliss.



Sikhism is a unique religion. Its symbols, practices, rituals (if any) and customs are also typical and unique. Whereas, this religion operates on a socio-economic plane, the attainment of the Formless (*Nirankaar*), Wondrous Lord (*Wahe Guru*), is achieved through an absolute medium. This way of life is at once mundane and metaphysically spiritual. It is a common notion that the Sikh religion emerged from the Hindu way of thinking. However, it must be appreciated that a particular social culture can also emerge from a diametrically opposite ethos. Likewise when Guru Nanak Dev moulded the traditional Indian classical music into *Shabad Keertan*, it was a miraculous transformation, the result whereof was aesthetically perfect, and its intent and its effect on the mind became ennobling and metaphysically liberating.



*Bluji Ajit Singh and his Dhadi Jathra.*

*Keertan* has been given prime place in Sikh traditions as this is the sole form of worship prescribed.

"To sing the praise of the Creator".

Even if *Naad* (absolute sound) was *Braham* (primary/absolute), *Geet* (emotion/song) first emerged as voice of the soul and found expression in the feeling and emotions of humans and in songs of the folk lores and music of the society. This folk music, put in crucible of the process of evolution of literary and artistic creations of intellect and subjected to the regimentation of organised thought and expression, takes the form of classical music

and arts. So also does the Indian music tradition have its inseparable roots in folk music. Human social psyche too has its roots in and emotional ties with its folk culture : its psycho-anthropological roots.

Quite a substantial part of the *Baani* (Scriptures in the *Guru Granth Sahib*) has been written and composed on the basis of folk tunes and lores of the contemporary Punjab, using popular folk lores associated with the day-to-day happenings of the common people. These folk lores were polished, burnished, refined and elevated with *raags* and set to suitable rhythm patterns. The phycho-mystic content of the then prevalent *raags* was fused with folk lores and a new social content was injected into the art form of music, which is much deeper in appeal and acceptance than the common music and which has far deeper influence and effect on the mind. Thus, various forms of folk music and poetry had been inseparably embodied in the *Keertan* tradition. Some significant forms of these are:

- (1) *Alaahanees* (2) *Anjalee* (3) *Sud* (4) *Shohilla* (5) *Keharlay* (6) *Kaafi* (7) *Ghorhiaan* (8) *Chhant* (9) *Dakhaney* (10) *Birharhay* (11) *Vanjaaraa* (12) *Vaar*.

A very prominent style of these folk forms in *Gurmat Sangeet* is the *Vaar*—an ode or a ballad. In folk tradition, *Vaars* were sung in the memory and praise of deeds of warriors and heroes. This form was used to raise the morale of people by narrating deeds or their valour and honour. In consonance with the spirit of the emerging new faith that Sikhism was, and its commitment to aggressive propagation of the good and dynamic propagation of the people, the Gurus wrote *Vaars* (odes) — singing the glory of the Almighty. There are 22 *Vaars* incorporated in the *Granth Sahib*. These *Vaars* are written under different *raags*/headings and 9 *Vaars* out of these are composed on basis of the popular prevailing folk lores of the 15th/16th century Northern India.

The most popular and significant of the *Vaars* is one in *Aasaa* *raag*, which is prescribed as the daily morning service in all Gurdwaras. It has the headings *Aasaa Mohalla 1* (*Aasaa* of the 1st Guru) *Vaar Slokan Naal*, *Tunday Asraje dee Dhunnee* (lore of the maimed King Asraj). The legend of Asraj was very popular in Rajasthan and the minstrels would sing this story



in song form. Based on the meteric construction and the 'style (*Ang*)—on which its *Pauris* were composed, a format was established for singing this *Vaar* by the Gurus. It opens with the declaration:

ਅਪੰਨਿ ਆਪੁ ਸਾਜਿਦਿ ਅਪੰਨਿ ਰਚਿਦਿ ਲਉ ॥

and then

ਜੇ ਸਉ ਚੰਦਾ ਭੁਥੈ ਸੁਰਜ ਚੜਹਿ ਹਜਾਰ ॥ ਏਤੇ  
ਚਲਣ ਹੋਇਆ ਗੁਰ ਬਿਨੁ ਭੋਰ ਅੰਧਾਰ ॥

*Such is His glory, and so goes on the ode.*

These lores are to be sung in the old traditional styles and are known as *Dhunees*, and are mentioned as subheadings on 9 out of the 22 *Vaars* in the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Each of these lores has a legend and a story of its own. Each of them has a different poetic meter, stanza, structure and embellishments with which they are sung. Traditional *raagis* (singers of *Gurmat*



*Musical instrument (Sarinda), Hoshiarpur, second half of 19th century. Carved teak inlaid with ivory.*

*Sangeet*) sang these lores (*Dhunees*) regularly till late. Now unfortunately, only a few of them are familiar with these traditional compositions!

Just as *alaap* singing of Indian classical tradition is said to be worship of the Absolute through sound, absolute *Naad Braham*, the religious practices of religion prior to Sikhism recommended worship out of the social context. They recommended renunciation and penances etc by an individual, in solitude. In the Sikh way of life, religion is practiced by participation at socio-economic levels while living a normal life. The attainment of Universal, the Timeless is recommended through deed, living and knowledge (*Gian*). Thus, in Sikhism, recourse is taken to the singing of the *Baani*.

*Maryada* at the Golden Temple at Amritsar is that of constant and continuous music, *Keertan*, divine and sublime, carried on day and night by relays of *Keertan Jathas* (*Rangis*) except for a couple of hours at midnight when cleaning and washing of the Temple is done. At that time, too, those who do the service, keep singing *Shabads*. This practice was first established by the Fifth Guru Arjan Dev and has continued ever since. No other prayer, ritual discourse of any kind or preaching as such is allowed at the holy precinct of the Harmandir.

The Tenth Guru's contribution to Sikh music was exceptional, as is evident from his compositions in the *Dasam Granth*. There are 9 different styles of poetry (*Chhands*), totaling 73 compositions in the *Dasam Granth* that deal directly with music and are called *Sangeet Chhands*. One such in original, is given as it is, and impossible to translate their rhythm and beat. The beauty of these compositions could be appreciated only by one who is conversant with playing on the *mridang*.

ਕਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਕੁਪਯੇ ਕਪਿ ਕਟਕ. ਬਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਬਜਨ ਬੱਜੀਯ।  
ਤਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਤੇਗ ਝਲਹਲੀ ਗਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਜੋਧਾ ਗਲ ਗੱਜੀਯ।  
ਸਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਸੂਰ ਸੰਮ੍ਰਿਧ, ਨਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਅਚਨ ਚੰਗ ਰੱਚਯੇ।  
ਸੰਸਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਸੁਭਟ ਨੇੜੇ ਸਮਰ, ਫਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਫੁੱਕ ਫਰੀਅਰ ਕਰੇ।  
ਸੰਸਾਗੜ ਦੀ ਸਮਟੇ ਸੁੰਕੜੇ ਫੁੱਕੜੇ ਫੁੱਕੜੇ ਫਿਰਿ ਫਿਰਿ ਧਰੇ।

*Kagarh di Kupio, kapi katak, Bagash di Bajan Rann Bajio*

*Tagarh di Teg Jhalhali, Gagarh di Jodha gal Gajjiye*

*Sagarh di soor amohay. Nagarh di aaran rang rachey*

*Sansagarh di subhat nache samar*

*Phagarh di phunk Phaniar karey*

*Sansagarh di Samattay Sunkarhai Phanpat Phan Phir Phir Dhare.*

Shabads sung in appropriate music is the quickest way to put human soul into harmony with the Creator and the working of His created Nature. Such music in Sikh parlance is called *Shabad Keertan*.

In the words of the learned musicologist Raghav R. Menon:

"Sikhism is perhaps the only religion that uses music as ritual, liturgy, prayer and insights. Hinduism is cautious and defensive on the subject of music and uses it sparingly in religious observance. There is, of course, the *bhajan*. But *bhajan* is not part of







## Shabad Keertan

At the very beginning of Sri Guru Granth Sahib the fundamental question is raised as how to become a Truth-oriented or God-oriented *Sachara*. Addressing this query the way of life recommended to a Sikh, in Guru Nanak's magnum opus *Japji* is of (ਗਾਈਐ, ਸੁਣੀਐ) singing and listening to the word (ਸਬਦ). Singing the word is given the prime position. The Sikh way of life, which this religion is, lays great emphasis on this and even 'jaap', 'simran' and 'dhyon' come next.

This raises the question of the quality, content and elements which such singing of the Word the keertan must imbibe. *Shabad* (Word), vehicle of thought, has to have an emotional content. *Gurbani* came to the Gurus as an integrated completeness of thought, emotion, and movement in time – to become effective and intelligible. It thus acquires prime importance that Keertan which now is termed as *Gurmat Sangeet* should not only reflect but also effectively embody the intent of the Gurus.

Let us remember that this is the sole form of worship which is prescribed in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Consequently it cannot be toyed around with populism, experimentation, fusion and so on, in the name of innovation. One must query as to how Keertan effects the mind, how Word and Naad have to be complementary and how thought and emotion must reinforce one another. How the 'ras' of *raag* was there in the mind of the Gurus when *Baani* was first enunciated and documented, is a vast subject.

The Gurus integrated the Brahminical purity of 'raag' with the basic, unrationalised (or suprarational) sentiments of chaste 'folk' – and far more. *Shabad Keertan* heritage embodies and gives us the human spectrum of his times as an integrated whole and the musical elements become a frozen heritage of his time. These sensibilities and characteristics become clear when one listens to the historic compositions and historic Keertanias.

This is unique style, that of singing the Divine Word. This is a style and 'ang' in itself. It needs to be preserved, understood and propagated, and need not be subjected to compartmentalisation into 'thaats' or 'raag parivars' or 'gharanas' of Hindustani music. One may, however use these as a means for better understanding of the Sangeet of the Gurus. The old 'reets' (or Kritis) need to be preserved in their purity because many of them are the original embodiments when 'Bani' was first revealed. Thus these ought to be studied and analysed to better understand how this particular Sangeet transmutes the inner self of the listener. In this context Dr Jagir Singh's attempt to analyse various elements of *raag 'Maru'* and its import in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and Sikh tradition is an extremely positive and educative effort. Similarly the style of drums played in Sikh musical ethos, the 'jori' is an unalienable element of Sikh tradition. We must not forget that a major portion of the 'Baani' in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is structured in such a manner that the 'asthai' and 'antars' are predetermined. By writing 'Ghar' on various *Shabads*, the *taal* patterns are defined as well.

Therefore before 'innovating', 'modernising' and 'popularising' our sacred *Shabad Keertan*, it must be ensured that the Guru's intent is not desecrated nor violated, and *Shabad Keertan* reduced to mere ritualism.

of its original self; nor does it seem to be the vehicle of what it was intended to convey. It almost seems to have lost its purpose.

*Keertan* performed in the *Gurmat Sangeet* tradition is a form and means of worship, the only one prescribed for the Sikhs. It is not any source of entertainment. This has to be fully understood. Putting it a colloquial way, classical music at best manifests *raags* and *raaginis* (as the emotional entity), but prevalent Indian common music produces imagery of dance, love and performers on the silver and small screens. *Keertan* must give us divine experience. The *Baani* thus sung must elevate us, put us into bliss and give the peaceful mystic experience of being



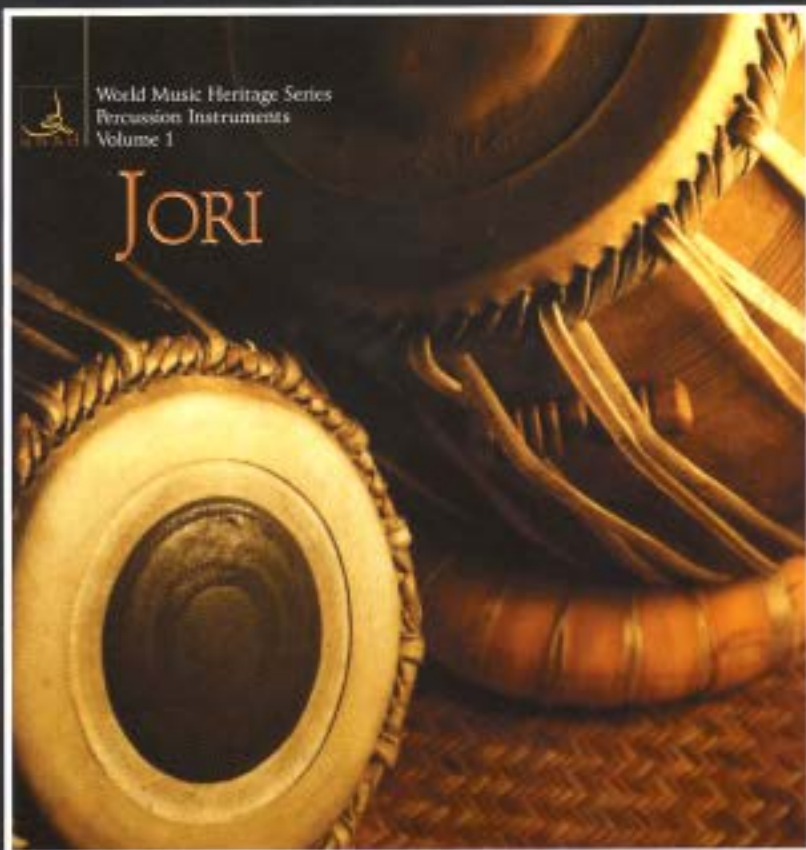
S. Anup Singh, Bhai Avtar Singh, Bhayee Sikandar Singh.

One with All : it must enoble us, it is food of the soul. Unfortunately, by and large, today's *Keertan* does not come anywhere near this. It is therefore the obligation of the present generation, mindful of the survival and propagation of the Sikh way of life, its traditions, its practices and the dictates of the great Gurus, to preserve and spread the correct liturgy.

When liturgy and form of worship lose their integrated character, when its practise is alienated and contrary to the fundamental precept, then mere ceremony or the idle act becomes only a ritual. Ritualism has no place in Sikh way of life: in fact it is negated and to be decried.

Bhayee Sikandar Singh





# Jori: a historical overview

Musical analysis of extant compositions (*shabad-reet*s), traditionally used in *gurbani kirtan* (devotional singing among the Sikhs), underlines the fact that the accompanying percussion instrument was always *mridang/pakhawaj*. Clear statements in the bani of Guru Nanak and Guru Arjan Dev and iteration of the fact in the odes of Bhai Gurdas (16th Century) leave no room for any doubt in this respect.

*Pakhawaj* is a drum shaped instrument that is kept in horizontal position while playing. Its two-side leather membranes, namely the left (*bayan*) and right (*dayan*), are tuned to the lower and middle octaves respectively. The creation of its modified version, called *jori*, is attributed by Sikh history and religious lore to Guru Arjan. In *jori* (literally 'a couple'), *bayan* and *dayan* are identified

as *dhamma* and *puda*. Also, these are shaped like two separate drums kept vertically on the floor for playing. *Puda* stands slightly shorter than *dhamma*, which may be up to fourteen inches in height. Crafted in wood and weighing around 16 kilograms, the *jori* is heavier than its ancestor, the *pakhawaj*. It is mostly tuned in the lower octave using wheat dough paste on the playing surface of *dhamma* to produce deeper bass sound. The emerging resonance also lingers longer. The upright placing of the *jori* gives more room to the playing hands of the percussionist and help achieve far greater range of modulations. From this developed a style that was at once sonorous and subtle, vigorous and delicate. It not only corresponded to the *bhakti bhav* (devotional nuances of the singer) but also reinterpreted the same in rhythmic patterns.





## Amritsari-BaaJ

The new mode of percussive accompaniment on *jori* became a coherent discipline under the care of Sikh *gurus*. It began to be identified as *Amritsari-baaJ* as the city of Amritsar had become the main centre of learning among the Sikhs with the installation (*prakash*) of *pothi sahib* (*adi-granth*) at the Darbar Sahib in 1604.

Percussive support on *jori* became a special feature of *gurbani kirtan*. In *Amritsari-baaJ* were subsumed and preserved all the elements that had been discovered or invented as appropriate for the music of the soul (*margi sangeet*).

In course of time the entire system (*silsila*) of *saath* and *jat* on *pakhawaj*, *gat* on *tabla*, and all the three variants on *jori*



together established a distinct percussive profile in the realm of music. *Amritsari-baaJ* was the umbrella term that covered it all.

Originally, the most comprehensive vocal musical structure, called *dhrupad*, had a corresponding percussive system accompanying it. The structural correspondence between the two created a symbiotic relationship at the level of resonance (*dhvani*).

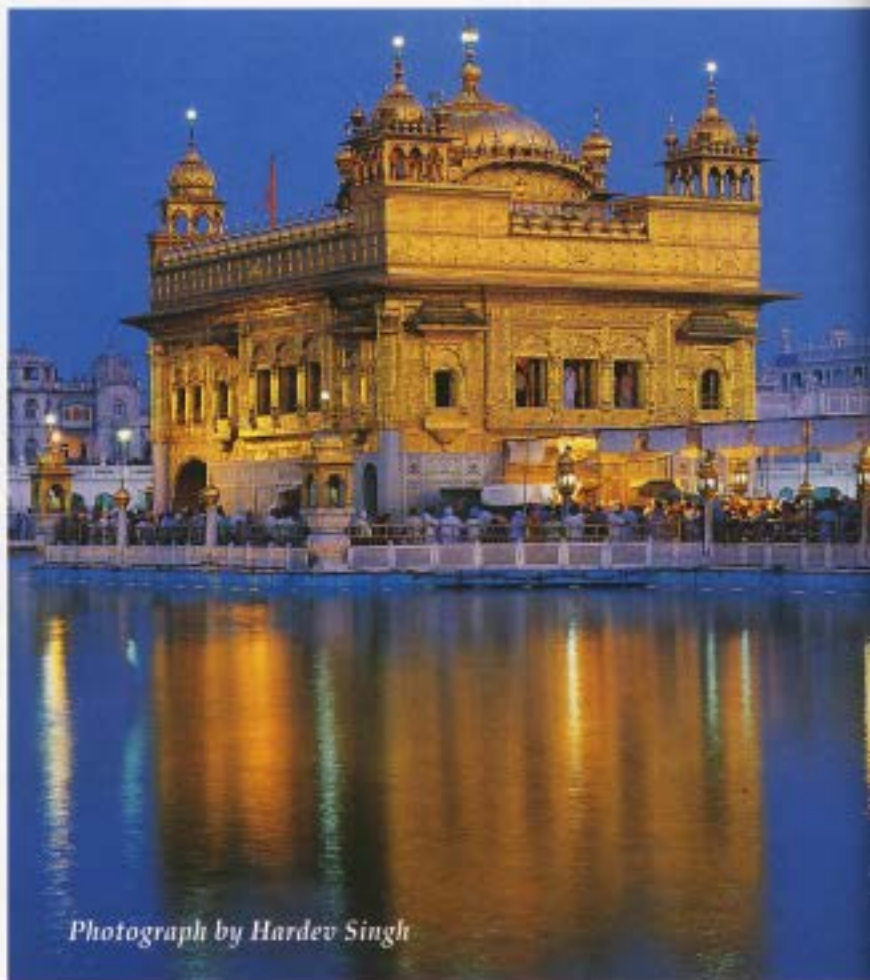
*Asthai*, *antara*, *sanchari* and *abhog* of a *dhrupad* composition are paralleled by the *ched*, *dugan*, *aar*, *tigan* and *mukaa* played on *pakhawaj/jori*.

The Mughal patronage of Indian classical music inadvertently led to the

dilution of text, rhythmic structures and musical embellishments that constituted *dhrupad* tradition. The original sense of the sacred that went with music was supplanted by the courtly needs of royalty.

The timeless spiritual ideals of music became hazy in courtly conclaves. The congregational ambience of *gurbani kirtan*, however, ensured that the original tradition of singing in *dhrupad* mode with the accompaniment of *jori/pakhawaj* continued uninterrupted.

The Sikh *gurus* did not deviate from the divine values of



Photograph by Hardev Singh

the *margi sangeet*. The *dhrupad* genre remained intact in *gurbani kirtan*. The Sikhs held fast to their musical heritage despite the great struggle for survival in the 18th century.

An unfortunate rupture occurred in 1947. For over 50 years now our intangible oral heritage has suffered erosion. *Jori* – its art and craft – is no more a part of the collective conscience of the Sikhs. Thus the revival of such traditional form by Bhai Baldeep Singh is of incalculable impact.



**Bhai Baldeep Singh** was born into a Sikh family deeply involved with the spiritual tradition of *gurbani kirtan*. He became a restless seeker of the invaluable rich musical heritage nurtured by the gurus. The loss of sense of the significant in music on the part of the Sikhs became a matter of great concern for him. He began patiently searching for masters in whom this sensibility was still alive. Even the infrastructure and the making of traditional musical instruments that made up the musical heritage that he wanted to relive, had to be created all over again.



His mentors for the *dhrupad* genre have been his granduncles, Bhai Avtar Singh and Bhai Gurcharan Singh, 11th generation singers of *gurbani*, Ustad Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar, a 19th generation scion of the *Dagar-vani* and Ustad M.Hafiz Khan, the 134th exponent of the *Khandar-vani*.

Bhai Baldeep Singh is today the 13th generation exponent of the *kirtan maryada*. He has assimilated the highly evolved and complex heritage of *shabad-reet*s from Bhai Gurcharan

Singh and Bhai Avtar Singh. Bibi Jaswant Kaur and Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari have also initiated him into some of the rare compositions preserved by legendary masters like Bhai Tabba.

## Jori Exponent

From Bhai Arjan Singh 'Tarangar' (1900-1995), one of the greatest exponents of the art, Bhai Baldeep Singh learnt the system (*silsila*) of *jori* and *pakhawaj/mridang* playing known as *Amritsari-banj*.

Today, he is the prime exponent (*khalifa*) of this Punjab *gharana* of classical percussion.

For his percussion related research, Bhai Baldeep Singh has interacted with the exponents of various traditions. Ustad Gyani Darshan Singh, Pandit Shankarrao Shindey Bua Appegaonkar, Bhai Narinder Singh, Pandit Laxmi Narayan Pawar, Pandit Gopal Das, Pandit Bal Krishan Sharma, Bhai Mohinder Singh, Bhai Balbir Singh and Ustad Altaf Hussain of Lahore constituted his peer group. From the *Bhramari-kathak* exponent Budhadeb Chattopadhyaya, Bhai Baldeep Singh received insights into the usage of *pakhawaj* even in *Kathak*.

Bhai Baldeep Singh is known for the purity of his rendition (*nikaas*) and his adherence to the grammar of the ancient percussive poetry, which is but rarely heard.

While the school of percussion that he represents is very old, Bhai Baldeep Singh brings to bear on it a very contemporary mind, which is sensitive to the eternal values of ancient music systems. His feel for string instruments and very special ability to craft instruments himself gives his percussion playing a special tonal musicality.

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Photos by Sarabjit Babra



*Jori* is a loving recreation of the sounds of pre-modern Sikh spiritual music. Bhai Baldeep Singh has immersed himself in the project of reviving this music and its unique drum, the *jori*. He sought out and studied with the leading player of the *jori* and he is a direct inheritor of the practice of singing of Gurbani, the Sikh devotional music. He trained under a number of *dhrupad* musicians as well. In this recording Bhai Baldeep Singh plays the extraordinarily resonant *jori* drum to the accompaniment of the *rabab*, an instrument which, like the *jori*, has not been publically heard in generations.

The invention of the *jori*, "couple," is attributed in Sikh lore to the 5th Master, Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1609). Its predecessor in Sikh devotional practice was the *pakhawaj*, the pre-eminent barrel drum of the Indo-Persian courts and of contemporary *dhrupad* music. During Guru Arjan's time, the *jori* became a specialty of practitioners of *Gurbani keertan* in the city of Amritsar, which by 1604 had become the capital of Sikh devotionalism. According to Bhai Baldeep Singh's research, the distinctive sound of the '*jori*' became associated with the city and its style of playing became known as the *Amritsari baaj*, the musical style of Amritsar. This style has now been all but forgotten and his project is to revive its structures, instruments, and sounds.

The right-hand drum of the *jori*, called the *puda*, heard on this recording, resembles the modern *tabla*. The left-hand drum, the *dhamma*, is larger, much heavier and taller, and is fashioned more like an oversized *tabla* than like the modern *bayan* of the *tabla* pair.

Like the *pakhawaj*, it requires the application of wheat dough to the centre of the skin. The deep resonant sound it produces is distinct from both the *tabla* and the *pakhawaj*.

Bhai Baldeep Singh's research has led him to believe that Sikh devotional music preserved the sounds and structures of early, pre-Mughal, *dhrupad* music. *Dhrupad* itself had devotional roots, but while later *dhrupad* music changed and developed stylistically to please its courtly patrons, Sikh *keertan*

remained centered on spiritual goals and retained the structures, embellishments, and aesthetics of the original style. Thus the *Amritsari baaj* is a rare and invaluable repository of musical and spiritual history.

Techniques of the *pakhawaj* playing called '*saath*' and '*jat*', and a style on *tabla* called '*gat*', defined by various uses of open or closed hand positions, all come together to create the techniques of the '*Jori*'. The three tracks on the CD explore progressive rhythmic levels and sounds, giving us a pleasing and impressive experience of this drumming tradition.

Accompanying the '*Jori*' on this CD is the '*rabab*'. The fretless plucked '*rabab*' that spread eastward with Persian court culture in the 16th and 17th centuries, took on a distinctive shape and musical role in the

Indo-Persian courts of North India. It became prominent between the 14th and 18th centuries in the hands of such luminaries as Tansen, the gem of the Mughal court of Akbar and his descendants. It had virtually died out by the early twentieth century, replaced by the modern *sarod*, which was descended from the *rabab* of Afghanistan. *Rababs* of different shapes and ancestries were played in North India throughout this period. A type of *rabab* is closely associated with Sikh practice through

Mardana, a disciple of the first Sikh Guru Nanak. It is both the legacy of Mardana and the *dhrupad* origins of this music that are evoked by the use of the *rabab* in this recording.

The CD begins with the deep, sonorous sound of the *rabab*. Somjit Dasgupta, a disciple of beloved *sarod* traditionalist Pt. Radhika Mohan Maitra, begins with phrases of *alap* in the noon-time raag *Gaud Sarang*. Dasgupta gives a soft-edged, rustic intonation to his playing, communicating a simplicity and sincerity suited to this project. The gut strings and skin-covered body give the *rabab* a slightly rough resonant quality unlike that of any contemporary Hindustani instrument. One can hear the scraping of the fingers over the fingerboard, giving an additional antique quality to the sound. We learn from the CD notes that this very *rabab* belonged to the legendary Basat Khan, one of the last great *rababis*. After the '*jori*' enters with its booming resonance, the *rabab*

The album and its exponent

# JORI



continues throughout to play *lehara*, a repeating line of composition expressing the *taal* cycle, here the 12-beat *chautal*.

The first track consists of sparsely and dramatically placed '*jori*' strokes, a sort of prelude to the sounds and rhythms of this music. Two brief vocalisations of drum syllables in Bhai Baldeep Singh's expressive voice are a unique addition to the track. A very slightly off-set rhythmic quality, in which drum strokes occur slightly before or after the beats, gives this style an unusual, abstract quality. The patterns gradually increase in density but the piece remains restrained throughout.

The second track is introduced by several *alaap* phrases of *raag Barwa* on the *rabab* before it settles into the *lehra* line. The flat third of the Barwa scale gives a sombre quality to the melody. The '*jori*' enters in double tempo patterns reminiscent of the rolling pace with which the *pakhwaj* often accompanies a *dhrupad* song. Soon we hear occasional doubling of internal patterns, and variations in stroke combinations, and the performance gradually increases in density as the patterns move in triple and quadruple pace. Overall the piece retains a dignified, soothing quality, inviting a calm involvement in this music.

The third track begins with *rabab* phrases in the sweet major-sounding melody of *raag Bihag*. The drumming here is more dense from the start, and we hear patterns of four, six, eight, and finally sixteen-speed work. Although North Indian drumming is justifiably famous for the broad scope of its improvisations, legendary drummers of various styles also created a substantial body of thoroughly composed material. These compositions, sometimes with specific names, themes, or poetic content, make up some of the most prized material in a drummer's inherited tradition. This track seems to be a showcase for such material and for the fast, cascading but still soothing sound of the *jori*.

The CD is beautifully recorded. The listener feels surrounded by the deep resonant sounds of the instruments. One comes away from this CD with a sense that the lost *Amritsari haaj* has a depth and beauty well worth reviving. The accompanying booklet's text and photographs are very attractive and convey the dignified mood and spiritual aspects of the project.

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It came to Baldeep Singh and he responded - with an all consuming passion, immersing himself in a glorious, but dwindled, tradition - *shabad keertan* in classical music - a gift of the Sikh Gurus, who espoused and prescribed *raag* and *taal*. He sought the few remaining masters, elderly and on their way, and imbibed whatever time allowed. He learned and trained and honed his skills, for 15 years now.

One result - a unique recording - *Jori*, a percussion solo, an extended form of *shaan*, the traditional prelude of *keertan chowki*.

His hands strike clear tones with elegance and appropriate restraint. He maintains a serene mood throughout, fitting for an instrument developed primarily in the context of spiritual music.

# The Guru's Call

A serious artist at work, he renders a smooth and systematic progression in tempo (*laya*) and rhythmic patterns (*ched, paran, rela*, etc.). The rendition is replete with complex passages and compositions difficult to execute - many with syncopated beats, and covering several cycles (*avartan*). While the rhythm is made livelier over the course of the three tracks, never does he lose the mellowness and somberness required of a percussive system associated with devotional music.

His objective is clear - to present and preserve the rich and distinct tradition that was initiated by Guru Arjan Dev and flourished well into the 20th century. Listening to the mellifluous tones, the graceful rhythms and the gently uplifting spirit of the *Jori*, it is easy to be transported back in history to a time when Sikh classical music thrived in the Punjab. Indeed, one can begin to imagine the sounds of Guru Tegh Bahadar's *mridang*.



The last half century or so has been particularly inimical to the traditional music heritage of the Sikhs. It is extremely heartening therefore to see in Bhai Baldeep Singh, deep dedication and strong resolve to revive the classical music heritage of the Sikhs and, accompanying that, a natural aptitude for this art form.

Bhai Baldeep Singh's passion for the Gurus' heritage shows clearly in the execution of this project. He has pulled out all the stops, presenting the CD in gorgeous packaging with striking pictures and liner notes on the background of and explanation of this percussive system. The choice of the melodic instrument is fitting to the tradition - not the harmonium (western in origin and not ideal for a musical system based heavily on microtones), which has become current in *shabad keertan* (as also in Hindustani music), but a stringed instrument, as was used by the Gurus and as the tradition continued into the beginning of the 20th century. The CD successfully demonstrates the magnificence of the Sikh classical percussive tradition.

However, the preservation of a heritage requires an essential additional step and that is its appreciation and patronage by the wider community. To this end I have some suggestions.

Percussion solos become much more accessible, and thereby more interesting to the general audience when accompanied by chanting of the mnemonic syllables (*bol*) just before they are played - starting with the theme (*theka*) and continuing with subsequent compositions to clearly delineate the shift between the theme and the variations. In addition, announcing the name of each composition, and/or the author it is associated with, brings history alive. Extensive liner notes providing the notation of the *taal* played and a complete glossary of terms deepen the understanding.

As for as my personal preferences, I would have liked the entire rendition of the single *taal* chosen, *chartaal*, in continuity, within a single *raag*, so that the momentum of progression of tempo is not dissipated in the interruptions. And, if more than one *raag* had to be used, to provide variety I guess, I would choose all morning/day or evening/night *raags*. Further, to emphasise the richness of Sikh heritage, these *raags* would be more distinctly from the Sikh tradition - morning *raags* like *Sooli* and *Prabhaati* (*Kalyaan Ang*), and evening *raags* like *Tukhaari* and *Maajh*.

It would be nice to see such features in future publications of Anad Records, to enhance its service to the Sikh music heritage.

There is also a role here for Sikh institutions and individuals who are in a position to provide financial support. A significant factor in the extent of dissemination is the pricing of the product. Grants and donations can facilitate a subsidised price of the product enabling wider distribution.

The *jori* is distinctly from the Sikh tradition found in none other, and ours to keep or to lose. Till the middle of the last century, the *jori* was the percussion instrument of a *keertan jattha*. *Shaan*, a mini *jori* solo - the salutation of the *raag* and *taal* to the *Bani* - was the way to begin *keertan choteki-s*, especially at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. The reason for the *jori* player to sit on the far corner from Guru Granth Sahib was to keep away the flying bits of dough from the *jori*. It was a common sight to see members of the *sangat* eagerly waiting to get a share of the discarded dough from the *jori*, for it was believed that eating it would cure speech impediments.

Over the last 50 years the *tabla* (which came into usage in the 18th century, i.e. in the post-Gurus' times, and in the non-devotional context of Mughal court music) has all but replaced the *jori* as the accompanying percussion in *shabad keertan*. In fact, in the Sikh *sangat*, the *tabla* is mistakenly referred to as the *jori*, even though the two are distinct instruments with different form, *bols* and accompaniment style. The *jori's* deep and sonorous tones and *bols* and rhythmic patterns developed especially for close partnership with devotional singing in the *dhruwad* style

from the Gurus' times, make it particularly suitable for traditional *shabad keertan*. Perhaps the only well known *keertan jattha* that uses the *jori*, is that of Bhai Sahib Bhai Avtar Singh Ragi, grand-uncle of Bhai Baldeep Singh. Bhai Swaran Singh of that *jattha*, has been playing the *jori* for over five decades now.

In recent years there has been a most fortunate resurgence of interest in the classical forms of *shabad keertan*, and in the preservation of Sikh music heritage. A number of commercial recordings are available that focus on singing *keertan* in accordance with the Guru's prescription and tradition. But there are no other commercial recordings, to my knowledge, that highlight the unique and rich aspects of this percussion instrument of the Gurus' period.

*Jori* by Bhai Baldeep Singh is a pioneering and important debut release, a laudable achievement and a major step in the right direction. It definitely deserves a place in the music collection of everyone interested in Sikh heritage. ☺

Inderjit N. Kaur





# Distinction of the Rabab



Guru Nanak in his sojourns sang *bani* accompanied by Bhai Mardana on the *rabab*. *Rabab*, *biin* (*veena*), *mridang/pakhawaj*, *iktara*, *saranda* etc., were accompanying instruments in all devotional singing in those medieval times.

*Rabab* and *Pakhawaj* remained the main instruments used in Sikh *kirtan*, along with *saranda*, *jori* and *taus*.

Somjit Dasgupta tells us of Bhai Mardana's own *rabab*, which he saw on display at the Sikh Gurdwara in Patna Sahib, birthplace of the tenth Sikh master, Guru Gobind Singh. The instrument on which he plays is very much similar in shape and form, as he recalls, to the one at Patna Sahib. Bhai Mardana's *rabab* was tragically lost in fire raging during the 1984 carnage against the Sikhs.

"Our effort is to sensitise ourselves regarding the significance of these instruments once integral to all modes of sacred music."

Two *rababs* of historical importance to the Sikhs are still extant. One of these, belonging to Guru Gobind Singh, is on exhibit at the Sikh Gurdwara at Mandi, Himachal Pradesh. Another *rabab* associated with Guru Hargobind is now with a private collector (who desires to remain anonymous) in Pakistan.

The instrument played by Somjit Dasgupta (in the recording under review) is a time-hallowed one, once used by Ustad Basat Khan, a direct descendent of Mian Tansen, in the 19th century.

According to *Quanoon-e-Mousiqi* by Sadiq Ali Khan (1864 AD), the *rabab* originally had five strings. Guru



Nanak added the sixth string to the *rabab* on which Bhai Mardana accompanied him. The *rabab* in this album is also a six stringed one.

In medieval times, the words *rabab* in Arabic and *veena* in Sanskrit, were generic for any bow and plucked string instrument having any shape, size of number of strings.

We have so far identified seven different forms of *rabab*. There are two that are played with a bow while, in the case of the other five, a plectrum (*jeel*) made of coconut shell is used to pluck the gut strings.

### Bowed versions

*Kamaicha* (quite different from the *kamencheh* played in Central and South Asia) and *saranda* are played with a bow.

- On *kamaicha*, only the middle and higher octaves are played (i.e. the instrument has a two octave range). This is because the *chakki* (sound box) is totally round (without a waist) and does not allow an individual tangent with the bow on the strings except on the main string (*baaj-di-taar*). The *ghori* (bridge) of the *kamaicha* is flat at the top, similar to the one on the *dhrupadi rabab*. The only difference is in the addition of the sympathetic strings are not placed beneath the main strings.

- The *saranda* has a beautiful 'waist' and a curved top *ghori* allowing all the main strings (three in the smaller *saranda* and four strings in the bigger *saranda* designed by Guru Amar Das) to be played individually.

- Rabbana* (played by the Kinnar community in Himachal Pradesh)
- Folk *rabab* (used in Afghanistan, Kashmir as well as other tribal areas in India).
- Dotara* (a two and a four stringed version found in India).

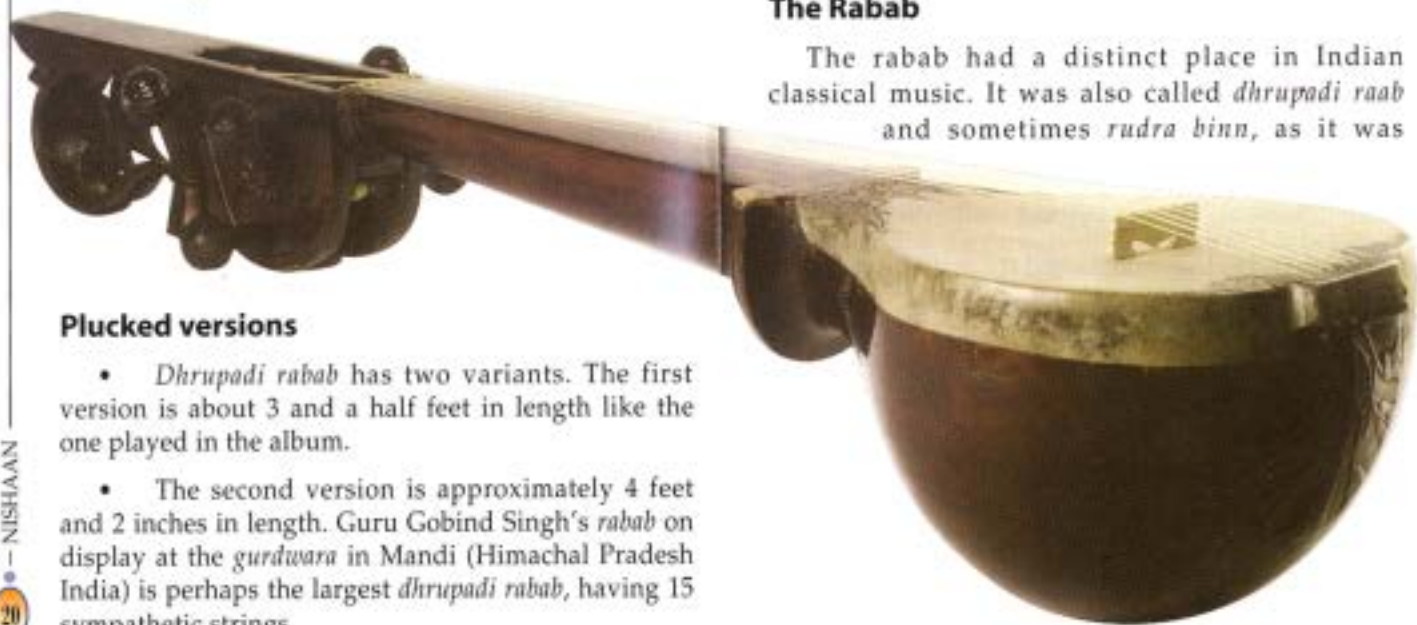
In India, audio recordings began in 1901. Musicians employed in the royal courts as well as those performing at the sacred shrines considered it demeaning to the muse and their patrons to be heard at the roadside tea stalls in recorded forms. The *hazuri kirtanias* (*gurbani* singing exponents) also declined to sing except in the presence (*hazuri*) of Guru Granth Sahib. Some of the finest exponents of those times such as Bhai Jwala Singh of Thatha Tibba, Bhai Sundar Singh, Bhai Sher Singh, Mian Karim Bakhsh, Ustad Harnam Singh of Jammu, Pt. Nathu Ram, Bhai Moti, Bhai Dal Singh, Bhai Chand and Bhai Baran Singh of Mehli, to name a few, were never recorded.

The old masters could not have imagined the kinds of music flooding the market today. I believe they would be saddened to see the impact that popular music has had on the tastes, judgement and preferences of the people.

This recording is an attempt to draw the listeners' attention to the deep spiritual import of Indian music. Our endeavour is to give the listeners and practitioners some examples of sacred music in its purity. May the sound of the magnificent *rabab* strike an inner chord of divinity in all of us.

### The Rabab

The *rabab* had a distinct place in Indian classical music. It was also called *dhrupadi raab* and sometimes *rudra binn*, as it was



### Plucked versions

- Dhrupadi rabab* has two variants. The first version is about 3 and a half feet in length like the one played in the album.

- The second version is approximately 4 feet and 2 inches in length. Guru Gobind Singh's *rabab* on display at the *gurdwara* in Mandi (Himachal Pradesh India) is perhaps the largest *dhrupadi rabab*, having 15 sympathetic strings.



associated with the *dhrupad* genre. Much later the name *rudra biin* came to be used for the large fretted instrument earlier just called *biin*. Instruments similar to the *rabab* certainly existed in India as early as the 5th century AD, as they can be seen in the Ajanta paintings. In fact, exchanges of musical scales, techniques and instruments have been going on between India and Greece through Persia and Afghanistan, from the very ancient times. The shift from the primacy of the harp-like to the zither-like string instruments had taken place in this region. It seems that when the zithers had nearly eliminated the harps, two main families of plucked zithers came to prevail in North India, the *veena* or the *biin* and the *rabab*. These two instruments were played for accompanying the singers of *dhrupada* (*dhrupad*) and devotional compositions in the courts, *ashrams* and temples.

The *dhrupadi rabab* was used from Punjab to Bengal for different styles of *kirtan* in various languages and religious traditions. The *jori* and *pakhawaj* assisted the *rabab* for *dhrupad* in the courts, *gurubani* in the Sikh tradition and *vaishnava kirtan* in temples.

By the 18th century AD, with the advent of *khayal* singing, which required a bowed string instrument like the *sarangi* to keep pace with rapid *tana*-work (note sequences) of *khayal*, the *rabab* and the *biin* became solo instruments. A good deal of innovations were then introduced to make them diverse and versatile, resulting in the inventions of new instruments such as *sarod*, *sitar*, *surbahar*, *sursingar* and many others.

The *rabab* has gut or silk strings. It originally had three types of bridges: the flat, the standing bridge and also a composite bridge having both the features. Later, after the introduction of *sarod*, the standing bridge was retained by *rabab* and the flat bridge went out of vogue.

The *rabab* repertoire consisted of compositions (*bandish*) as well as the stroke work (*bolkaari*) in *dhrupad* mode and solo compositions (*gat*). These *gat* style compositions have been inherited by *sitar* and *sarod*, the two instruments that *rabab* preceded.

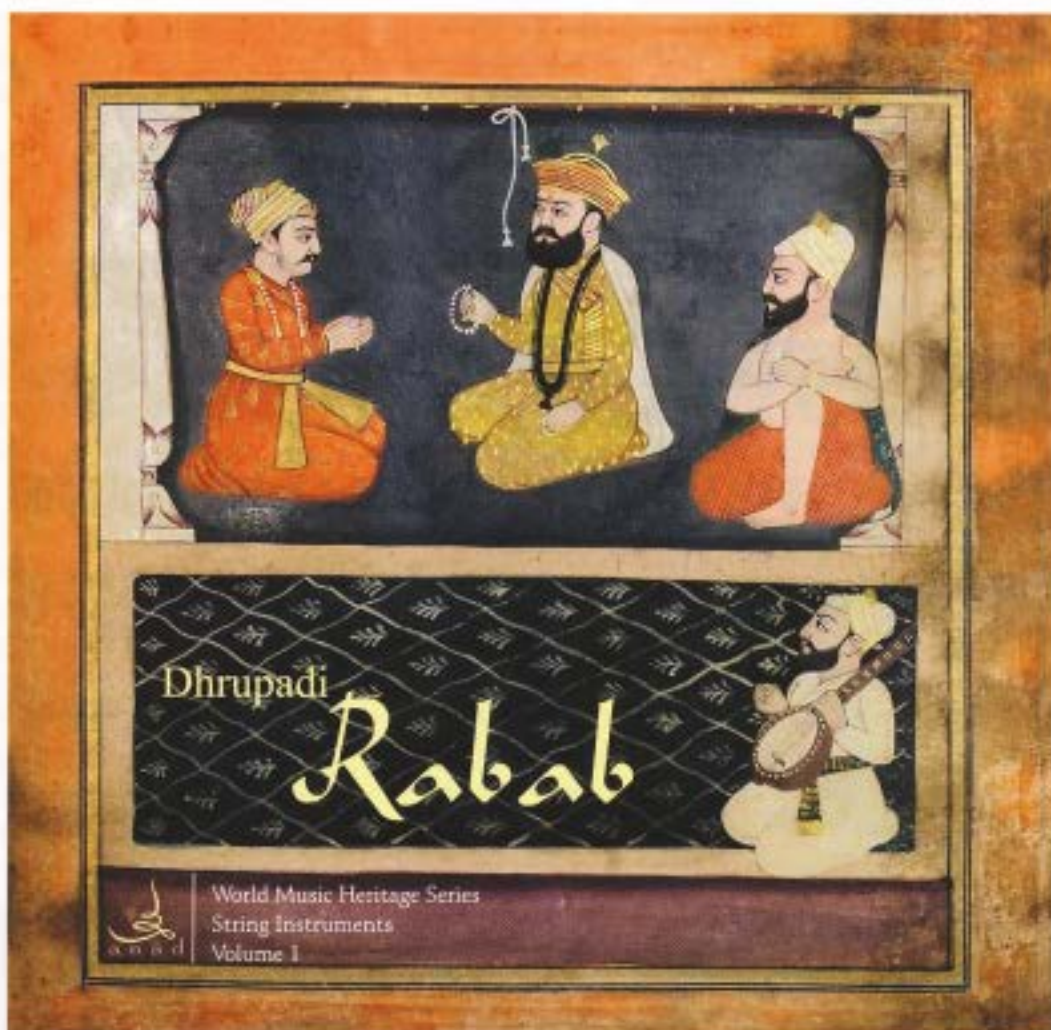
Earlier, a *rabab* performance was adorned with musical embellishments of the *dhrupad* genre such as *gamak* and strokes of the right hand, while later it





evolved more like the present day rhythmic patterning (*layakari*). The great maestros developed the new style of *gatkaari*, *bolkaari* and *larant*.

*Rabab*, with its gut strings and wooden base, without the metal plate used in *sarod*, can produce all the ornamentations that are played on *sarod* or *sitar*. In *biin* and *sitar* playing, side strings (*chikari*) are extensively used. Instead, in rendering of *jhala* on *rabab*, four of the main strings are used in place of *chikari*. In fact the present day techniques of *sarod* playing are inherited directly from the *rabab*.



**Somjit Dasgupta**, born in Kolkata in 1960, has preserved the tradition of playing Indian classical music on string instruments belonging to the *rabab* family. As a musician he performs on

*sarod*, *dhrupadi-rabab*, *sur-rabab*, *mohan vina* and *sur-singaar*. He learnt the playing techniques of these instruments from his mentor and guru, the late Shri Radhika Mohan Moitra, a legendary *sarod* player.

It is an honour for us, at Anad Records, to present the first solo album of *dhrupadi rabab* played by Somjit Dasgupta.

Guru Nanak in his travels sang *baani* accompanied by Bhai Mardana on *rabab*. This recording is an attempt to draw the listeners' attention to the deep spiritual import of Indian music.

Our endeavour is to give to the listeners and practitioners some examples of sacred music in its purity. May the sound of the magnificent *rabab* strike an inner chord of divinity in all of us. ॐ

*Bhai Baldeep Singh*



# Gurbani Sangeet And Raag Maroo

**G**urmat Sangeet is the idiom of music in which Gurbani is sung. Ordinarily, the hymns included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib are termed as Gurbani. In addition to light thrown on the religious, literary and cultural dimensions, it has great importance in musical dimensions also. The musical element in the Gurbani compositions is not externally imposed on these compositions, but in fact, are an inherent part of these compositions which were intuitively revealed to the Gurus and Bhagats, made abundantly clear in the *Janam Sakhis*. Whenever there is reference to the process or mode of revealing these composings, the singing of Gurbani is mentioned. For example, whenever the moment for revelation of Gurbani came to Guru Nanak Dev, he would instruct Bhai Mardana to play the Rabab while the Gurbani was being revealed to the Guru who then sang it.

Guru Arjan Dev organised the Gurbani in a very specific mode under 31 main Raags along with 31 other variant Raags which are derived from the main Raags or are created by combining elements of two or more Raags. While editing the Gurbani, he not only gave concrete indications for the manner of singing Gurbani but also established a tradition for making Gurbani as a part of daily routine in life of the Sikhs.

**Maroo Raag:** Although *Maroo Raag* is at serial 21 in the sequence of Raags included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it is the third in importance when viewed by the quantum of Gurbani composed in it, the first being *Raag Gauri* and the second *Raag Aasaa*. It includes the Banis of Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Angad Dev (only one Salok), Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das, Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur. In addition the Banis of Bhagat Kabir, Namdev, Ravi Das and Jaidev are also included in this raag.

**Correlation between the sentiment of Gurbani in Raag Maroo and the sentiment of Raag Maroo:** Raags are created by combining different lower and higher musical notes. The internal structure of a raag depends on the manner of sequential arrangements of musical notes and their relative quantum determines the sentiment of a Raag. Eminent musicologists of Indian music believe that different Raags create different types of feelings and emotions.

In the ancient period of India, the present day entity of Raag was named as *Jati*. Bharat, an eminent

musicologist of that period, in his "Naat-Shastra" has discussed the mutual correlation amongst *Raag*, *Rasa* and *poetry*. He advocated that the poetical compositions permeated with a *Rasa* of a fundamental note (*Sthai*) of a particular *Jati*, should be sung in that *Jati*. He indicated the *Rasa* associated with different basic notes as below:

Basic Note	Rasa
Shadaj-Sa	Veer (Enthusiasm), Raudar (Anger), Adbhut (Wonder)
Reshabh-Re	Veer (Enthusiasm), Raudar (Anger), Adbhut (wonder)
Gandhaar-Ga	Karun (Sorrow)
Madham-Ma	Shinghaar (Love), Haas (Mirth)
Pancham-Pa	Shinghaar (Love), Haas (Mirth)
Dhaiwat-Dha	Veebhats (Disgust), Bhiyaanak (Awe)
Nishaad-Ni	Karun (Sorrow)

Sharangdev and Damodar Pundit accepted Bharat's viewpoint regarding the concept of *Raag-Rasa* but later another musicologist Ahobal came out with a different correlation between the notes and their *Rasa*:

Note	Rasa
Sa	Haas (Mirth)
Re	Shinghaar (Love)
Ga	Haas (Mirth)
Ma	Shinghaar (Love)
Pa	Bhiyaanak (Awe)
Dha	Veebhats (Disgust)
Ni	Karun (Sorrow)

In modern times (the early 20th century), musicologist Vishnu Narain Bhatkhande propounded a theory regarding the *Rasa* of *Ragaas* as determined by various combinations of notes in their structure as follows:

- The *Ragaas* with Komal (flat) *Re* and *Dha* have a *Rasa* which is *Shaant* (Tranquility), and *Karuna* (Sorrow).
- Raags with Komal *Ga* and Komal *Ni* have *Rasa*/ *Bhaava* of Valour.



• Raag with normal Re and Dha have Rasa of Shinghaar.

ਗੁਰ ਕੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਅਰਾਧੀਐ ਨਾਮਿ ਰੰਗਿ ਬੈਰਾਗੁ ॥

ਜੀਤੈ ਪੰਚ ਬੈਰਾਈਆ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਫਲ ਮਾਰੂ ਇਹ ਰਾਗੁ ॥ (ਸਲੋਕ ਮ: 5)

*Through the Word of the Guru's Shabad, I worship and adore the Naam, with love and balanced detachment.*

*When the five enemies are overcome, O Nanak, this musical measure of Raga Maaroo becomes fruitful.*

(SGGS, P. 1425)

In this Sloak, the Guru has dealt with the theme of conquering the five enemies i.e. Kaam, Karodh, Lobh, Moh, Hankaar. In the Bani of this Raag, the theme of conflict and victory have been dealt with. The Gurus have extensively used the vocabulary related to battles:

ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੇ ਕਾਨ ਲਗੇ ਭਨ ਭੀਤਰਿ ਵੈਦੁ ਕਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਕਾਰੀ ਜੀਉ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*My body is pierced through with the arrow of love. How can any physician understand the cure?*

(SGGS, p. 993)

Amongst the battle weapons, not only arrows but Khandaa, Gadaa, Chakkar also find mention:

ਪੰਚ ਬਾਣ ਲੇ ਜਮ ਕਉ ਮਾਰੇ ਗਗਨੰਤਰਿ ਪਨਧੁ ਚੜਾਇਆ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*Taking up the five arrows of virtue, Death is killed, drawing the bow of the Tenth Gate in the Mind's Sky.*

(SGGS, p. 1042)

ਗਿਆਨ ਖੜਗੁ ਲੈ ਮਨ ਸਿਉ ਚੁਧੈ ਮਨਸਾ ਮਨਹਿ ਸਮਾਈ ਹੇ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*Taking up the sword of spiritual wisdom, she struggles with her mind, and hope and desire are smoothed over in her mind.*

(SGGS, p. 1022)

ਖੰਡੇਪਾਰ ਗਲੀ ਅਤਿ ਭੀੜੀ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*This path is very narrow, like the sharp edge of a sword.*

(SGGS, p.1028)

ਜੰਘ ਚੰਕਰ ਗਦਾ ਹੈ ਧਾਰੀ ਮਹਾਸਾਰਥੀ ਸਤਿਸੰਗਾ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

*He carries the conch, the chakra and the war club; He is the Great Charioteer, who stays with His Saints.*

(SGGS, P. 1082)

ਸਸਤ੍ਰਿ ਤੀਖਣਿ ਕਾਟਿ ਫਾਰਿਓ ਮਨ ਨ ਕੀ ਨੇ ਰੋਸ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

*The sharp tool cuts down the tree, but it does not feel anger in its mind.*

(SGGS, p. 1017)

The use of words like Sanghaaran shows that the rasa of bravery is manifested in the Bani written in Maroo Raag:

ਕਾਮੁ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਅਹੰਕਾਰੁ ਨਿਵਾਰੇ ॥

ਤਸਕਰ ਪੰਚ ਸਬਦਿ ਸੰਘਾਰੇ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*Eradicating lust, anger and egotism,*

*She destroys the five thieves through Words of the Shabad.*

(SGGS, p. 1022)

ਕਾਮਿ ਕ੍ਰੋਧ ਲੈ ਗਰਦਨਿ ਮਾਰੇ ਹਰਿਮੈ ਲੋਭੁ ਚੁਕਾਇਆ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*He seizes sexual desire and anger by their necks, and destroys them; He eradicates egotism and greed.*

(SGGS, p. 1040)

ਅਸੁਰ ਸੰਘਾਰਣ ਰਾਮ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*My Lord is the destroyer of demons.*

(SGGS, p. 1028)

ਅਸੁਰ ਸੰਘਾਰਣ ਰਾਮ ਹਮਾਰਾ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

*He is the Slayer of demons, our Supreme Lord and Master.*

(SGGS, p. 1082)

ਸੋਹਨ ਮਾਘਵ ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਮੁਰਾਰੇ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

*The Enticer of Hearts, the Lord of wealth, Krishna, the enemy of ego.*

(SGGS, p.1082).

The guidance given to the mankind also include elements of bravery:

ਅਗਾਹਾ ਰੂ ਕ੍ਰਾਮਿ ਧਿਥਾ ਫੇਰਿ ਨ ਮੁਹਭਤਾ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਿਫਿ ਇਵੇਹਾ ਵਾਰ ਬਹੁਰਿ ਹੋਈ ਜਨਮਤਾ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਫਖਣੇ ਮ: 1)

*Look ahead; don't turn your face backwards.*

*O Nanak, be successful this time, and you shall not be reborn.*

(SGGS, p.1096)

There is a unique commonality amongst the Gurus and the Bhagats in portraying similar Bhaav of valour in Bani written in Maroo Raag.

ਪਹਿਲਾ ਮਰਨੁ ਕਬੂਲਿ ਜੀਵਨ ਕੀ ਫਤਿ ਅਸ ॥

*First, accept death, and give up any hope of life.*

ਹੋਹੁ ਸਭਨਾ ਦੀ ਰੇਤੁਕਾ ਤਉ ਆਉ ਹਮਾਰੈ ਪਾਸਿ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

*Become the dust of the feet of all, and then, you may come to me.*

(SGGS, p. 1102)

ਭਗਨ ਦਮਾਮਾ ਬਾਜਿਓ ਪਰਿਓ ਨੀਸਾਨੈ ਆਉ ॥

*The battle-drum beats in the sky of the mind; aim is taken, and the wound is inflicted.*

ਏਤ ਜੁ ਮੰਡਿਓ ਸੁਰਮਾ ਅਬ ਚੁਧਨ ਕੋ ਦਾਉ ॥

*The spiritual warriors enter the field of battle; now is the time to fight!*

ਸੁਰਾ ਸੇ ਪਹਿਚਾਨੀਐ ਸੋ ਲਰੈ ਦੀਨ ਕੇ ਹੇਤ ॥

*He alone is known as a spiritual hero, who fights in defense of religion.*

ਪੁਰਜਾ ਪੁਰਜਾ ਕਟਿ ਮਰੈ ਕਬਹੂ ਨਹ ਚਾਏ ਖੇਤੁ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ)



He may be cut apart, piece by piece, but he never leaves the field of battle.

(Kabir Ji, SGGS, p. 1105)

Bhagat Namdev also remembers the Almighty as the destroyer of demons:

ਭਗਤ ਨੇੜਿ ਮਰਿਹਿ ਹਰਨਾਖਸ ਸਿੰਘ ਰੂਪ ਹੋਇ ਦੇਹਿ ਧਰਿਹਿ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ)

For the sake of His devotee Prahlaad, God assumed the form of the man-lion, and killed Harnaakhash.

(SGGS, p. 1105)

The following Shabads from Maroo Raag have a place of primacy amongst the Shabads sung during Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom Gurburb:

ਉਤਕਿ ਨਿਬਹੀ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਿ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

The love which the Lord's servant feels for the Lord lasts forever.

(SGGS, p. 1000)

ਬਹੁਰਿ ਹਮ ਕਾਹੇ ਆਵਹਿਗੇ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ)

Why should I come into the world again?

(SGGS, p. 1103)

The shabads sung during cremation and subsequent events connected with the death of a Sikh include many from the Baani in Maroo Raag.

ਮੁਰਖ ਮਨ ਕਾਹੇ ਕਰਸਹਿ ਮਾਣਾ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1)

O foolish mind, why are you so proud?

(SGGS, po. 989)

ਸੰਜੋਗੁ ਵਿਭੋਗੁ ਪੁਰਹੁ ਹੀ ਹੁਆ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਅੰਜੋਲੀ ਮ: 1)

Union and separation are ordained by the Primal Lord God.

(Guru Arjan Dev Ji, SGGS, p. 1007)

ਬਿਰਖੇ ਹੋਨਿ ਸਭਿ ਸੰਤ ਇਕਠੇ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5)

Beneath the tree, all beings have gathered.

(SGGS, p. 1019)

ਬਾਬਾ ਅਬ ਨ ਬਸਉ ਇਹ ਗਾਉ ॥ (ਮਾਰੂ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ)

O father, now I shall not live in this village.

(SGGS, p. 1104)

**Relationship between poetic forms used in Gurbani (Raag Maroo and Raag):** Some of the poetic forms used in Gurbani of Maroo Raag are of the type normally used in conventional patterns like 'Padey, Ashtpadi, Solhey, Anjali, and Sloak. Some of the forms are based on the folk poetic forms like Vaars and Dakhney. In the Indian musical tradition, there is an intimate relationship between the poetical forms and the Raags. Many of the Indian Raags are based on the folk poetry's musical lores. The names of some of the Raags are either associated with the caste of people or with a particular place. There are very clear indications to this effect in certain cases as follows:

Majh Raag is considered to be associated with the Majhaa region of the Punjab while some consider it to be associated with Madhya Pradesh. There is a poetic form in the Punjabi language, which is named Majh. Gauri Raag is associated with Gaur region while there is another poetical form called as Gaurhaar. Other examples include:

Raag	Region/Caste
Gujri	Gujarat/ Gujar Desh
Sorath	Sorath/Saurashtra Desh
Maaroo	Maaroo Desh/ Rajasthan
Kanra	Kanhar Desh
Telang	Telangaana Desh
Bairari	Bairaar Desh
Todi	Toda Caste
Gaund	Gaunda Caste

It is said that Dhanasri Raag is sung during crop harvesting and is believed to increase the crop yields. Thus this Raag comes closer to folk tunes. Many folk tunes are based on Raag Sarang. Flutes played by cattle grazers and tunes used by the snake charmers are also based on Raag Sarang. Folk songs associated with expression of joy are called Malhar, which is also the name of a Raag. Thus there is a variety of relationships between Raag and poetical forms of folk lores.

Many of the poetical structure of the Baani included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib are based on folk music styles i.e. those tunes of the folk music with their associated rhythm and metrical dimensions which the Guru Poets used for the poetical forms such as Chhant, Aalahnayaan, Vaars, Ghoriaan, Birharey, wherein despite the unique themes of the subject matter the folk element of the music is maintained.

**Poetic Forms Used in Maroo Raag Gurbani:** The following poetical forms have been used for the Gurbani in this raag.

*Padey, Vaar, Sloak, Anjali and Dakhney*

**Padey:** A variety of Padey forms such as Do-Padey, Ti-padey, Cho-Padey, Punj-Padey, Chhey-Padey, Asht-Padi, Sohiley have been used. Sohiley comprising of 16 Padeys has been used only in Raag Maroo. The poetical form of Padey has been used to the maximum extent in Shri Guru Granth Sahib. The extent of use of this form in Maroo Raag is as below:

Guru Nanak Dev : 12 Padey, 12 Ashtpadi, 22 Sohiley, total 46 Padeys.

Guru Amar Das : 5 Padey, 1 Ashtpadi, 23 Sohiley, total 27 Padeys



Guru Ram Das : 8 Padey

Guru Arjan Dev : 31 Padey, 6 Ashtpadi

Guru Tegh Bahadur: 3 Padey

The *Padey* form has a special relationship with music. Almost every *Padaa* has a line called *Rahao*. According to Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha, *Rahao* means that part of the *Padaa* which is repeatedly sung following the singing of each one of the *Antra* of a *Padda* and hence is termed as "*Tek*" or "*Sthai*".

As the *Rahao* part of a *Padaa* is specifically made distinctive, some scholars consider the *Padey* poetical form meant for singing in Dhrupad style. According to Bharati Sangeet Kosh, Dhrupad means stable or non-movable or some entity, which lasts long. Such characteristics are only possessed by God alone and therefore *Padey*, which are sung in the praise of God, are called *Dhrupad*. Going by such a criteria, the *Padey* of *Maroo Raag* can be considered as meant for singing in Dhrupad style. According to musicologist Bhathkhandey, Dhrupad compositions have 4 parts: *Sthai*, *Antaraa*, *Sanchaari*, and *Abhog*. It is up to the composer to decide as to how many stanzas to keep in each part. The Gurus exercised such freedom and have composed *Padeys* with varying numbers of stanzas such as two, three, four, five, six, eight and even sixteen.

**Poetic Form of Vaar:** This poetic form has a special place in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Out of 22 *Vaars* under this heading, the Gurus themselves composed 21 *Vaars*. *Vaar* as a poetic form was quite prevalent even before the times of the Gurus. We get an indication of this fact from Shri Guru Granth Sahib as there are specific instruction given by the Gurus to sing some of these *Vaars* in a specific *Dhun*/tune of a particular *Vaar* which was current in that period. *Vaars* are therefore associated with music from the very beginning. According to Principal Teja Singh, *Vaar* poetical form is similar to the Greek poetical form called Ode. Standing persons with instruments similar to those used by the Dhaadies of the Punjab also sing odes. Ode has three parts :Strafe, anti-strafe and Epode. One person sings strafe while anti-strafe is sung by the second person. The *Vaars* of Punjabi literature are also sung in a similar manner though the Dhaadies these days do not strictly follow this practice. However, the Raagies while sing the Aasa-Di-Vaar follow this pattern as one Ragi sings one Sloak while the second Ragi sings the next Sloak. The *Pauri* is sung by all of them together and then read out by one of these.

*Maroo Raag* has two *Vaars*: one by Guru Amar Das and the other by Guru Arjan Dev.

**Anjali.** : This poetic form is used along with *Padey*. According to Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha, there is a tradition of offering *Tilan-jali*, an extract of til seeds and other A things to the spirit of the deceased after

cremation. In the Sikh tradition, *Anjali* as composed by Guru Arjan Dev is also sung and is perhaps an offering to the Divine spirit.

**Sloak and Dakhnaa:** The poetic form of Sloak has been extensively used in Guru Granth Sahib in *Nitnam Baanies*, in *Baanies* composed under various *Raags* and also in *Baani* which is not under *Raag* headings. The *Raagis* may sing these in a particular rhythm or may recite them in the form of *Alaap* without the use of any rhythm. The sloaks of the *Vaars* are sung in a specific rhythm. The *Vaars* in the *Raag Maroo* have *sloaks* as a part of them.

The *sloaks* which have been composed in the language of Multan-Sahiwal region, south of Guru Nanak's birthplace, are called *Dakhney* i.e. pertaining to south (*Shabadarth*). In the Gurmat Sangeet tradition, *Dakhneys* are sung as independent entities while singing *Vaars* in a particular lore.

**Singing of the Bani in Raag Maaroo:** The practice of singing Bani of *Raag Maaroo* has been followed from times of the Gurus. The *Raagis*, the singers of Gurmat Sangeet have been preserving this tradition by means of their formal training in the performance of *Raag Maroo*. The performance related features of this *Raag* along with suitable notations for singing individual Shabads of this *Raag* have been published by Gian Singh Abottabad, Avtar Singh-Gurcharan Singh, Prof. Tara Singh, Principal Dyal Singh, Sant Sarwan Singh of Dumaili. As this *Raag* has been in use since early times, there are different versions of the performance related features of it. Musicologists have been making efforts to determine the appropriate features from time to time. Dr. Gurnam Singh in his books 'Gurmat Sangeet Prabandh' and *Paasaar, Sikh Musicology* has tried to lay down those features for this *Raag* along with similar features for other *Raags* as were prevalent in the traditional Gurmat Sangeet.

*Maroo Raag* is also called *Maarav*, *Maarvaa*, *Maarvik* etc in ancient musical treatises. It is called by only one name *Maroo* in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. (However, *Maroo* as sing in Gurmat Sangeet is quite distinct form *Maroo* of North Indian Music and also *Maarraa*)

As *Maroo Raag* has been in use from old times, there are a number of its versions, which are now prevalent. These are:

Bhai Kanh Singh Nabha: This *Raag* is of 'Shaadv category using only six notes of the scale omitting note *Pa*. Notes *Sa*, *Ga* *Dha*, *Ni* are *Shuddh* while *Re* is *Komal* (flat) and *Ma* is *Teevar* (sharp) *Ga* is *Vadi* while *Dha* is *Samvaadi*. (Some musicologist has classified it as 'Sampooran' *Raag* using all the seven notes all of which are *Shuddh*). It is at serial 21 in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This *Raag* is sung as ordinary tunes in afternoons during



Vaars and at the time of demise of a person.

Bali gives the above noted features with the modification that the *Va* note is *Dha* and *Samvaadi* as *Ga*.

Sangeet Kosh says that its *Thaat* is *Poorvi* Category: *Sampooran-Sampooran*, *Vaadi:Re* while *Samvaadi: Dha Komal*, Both *Ma* are used. Time for singing: 4th *Pahar* (afternoon) of the day. *Aroh: Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Ma(Sharp), dha, Ni, Sa; Avroh: Sa Ni, dha Pa Ma(Sharp) Ma Ga Re Sa*.

Some musicologists have classified *Maroo Raag* under *Bilawal Thaat*. *Vadi* is *Ga* while *Samvaadi* is *Ni*. *Re* and *Dha* are omitted in *Aroh* while *Avroh* is complete and hence the category is *Audav- Sampooran*. This version is closer to *Raag Maroo-Bihag* but in *Bihag* both *Mas* are used while only *Ma* is used in this version of *Maroo*. Hence these two *Ragaas* can be differentiated.

*Aroh: Sa Ma, Ma Ga, Ga Ma Pa Ni Sa*

*Avroh: Sa ni Dha Pa, Pa Ga, Ma Ga, Sa Re Sa.*

*Mukh Ang: Sa Re Sa Ni, Sa Ma Ma Ga, Ni Pa, Dha Ma, Pa Ga, Sa Re Sa.*

*Thaat Khamaaj*, category: *Audav-Vakr-Sampooran; Vadi Ga, Samvaadi: Ni; Re and Dha omitted in Aroh; Both Ni and Ni Komal* are used; time for singing: Third *Pahar* of the day. *Sa* is nominally touched during *Aalaap*. *Re* is used minimally and is often used via 'meendh' in a subtle manner.

*Aroh: Ni. Sa, Ga, Ma Pa Ni Sa.*

*Avroh: Sa Ni (Komal), Dha, Pa Dha Ma, Ma Pa Ga, Sa.*

*Mukh Ang: Ni(Komal) Dha Pa, Dha Ma, Ma Pa Ga Sa.*

In this version *Bhai Avtar Singh-Gurcharan Singh* have treated *Sa* as the *Samvaadi* note.

A committee comprising eminent Sikh musicologists and *Raagis* have determined the following version of this *Raag* that is now being used by the *Raagis* performing *Kirtan*:

Note: Both *Ma* and *Ma (Sharp)*, both *Dha* and *Dha (Komal)*, both *Ni* and *Ni (Komal)*; category: *Shadav-Sampooran; Vadi: Ga, Samvaadi Ni; Re omitted in Aroh*.

*Aroh: Sa Ga Ma Pa, Dha Ni Sa*

*Avroh: Sa Ni (Komal) Dha Pa, Ma (Sharp) Pa dha Ni dha, Ma Ga Re Sa.*

*Pakkar (Catch Phrase): Pa Dha Ni Dha Pa Ma Pa Ga, Pa Dha Pa Ga Re Ga re Sa.*

**Maroo-Kaafi:** Only the *Bani* of *Guru Nanak Dev* is given under this *Raag* variant. As this *Raag* is not mentioned in ancient treatises, *Maroo-Kafi* is considered as original to *Gurmat Sang*. This *Raag* is noted as "*Maroo-Kafi Mohalla 1, Ghar 2*" after invocation which shows that it is different

from *Maroo Raag* but it is a variation of *Raag Maroo*. It is a combination *Maroo* and *Kafi Raag*. Two versions of are prevalent at present:

Category: *Audav-Vakr Sampooran; Vadi Pa, Samvaadi: Sa*; time for singing: First part of the night; Notes: Both *Ga* and *Komal Ga*, both *Ni* and *Komal Ni*, ; Notes omitted: *Re* and *Dha* in *Aroh*.

*Aroh: Ni Sa Ga Ma Pa Ni Sa*

*Avroh: Sa Ni Pa, Pa Ma Pa Ga, Ma Ga(Komal), Sa Re Sa.*

Catch Phrase: *Sa Ga Ma Pa, Dha Ma Pa Ga, Ma Ga, Sa Re Sa.*

A committee appointed for determining the structure of *Gurbani Raag* and some other musicologists have considered the following version as authentic for *Gurmat Sangeet*:

Category: *Sampooran; Vadi: Pa* while *Samvaadi* as *Sa*; time for singing: first part of night; Notes: Both *Ga*, Both *Ma*, both *Ni* other notes pure; no note omitted.

*Aroh: Sa Ga Ma Pa, Pa Ma(Sharp) Dha Ma Pa, Dha Sa, Ni Sa.*

*Avroh: Sa Ni Dha Pa, Dha Pa Ga(Komal), Re Ni Sa.*

Catch Phrase: *Pa Ga Ma Pa, Pa Dha Pa Ga Ma Pa, Pa Ma Pa, Ni Dha Pa, Ma Pa Ga Re Sa.*

**Maroo Dakhni:** Only the *Bani* of *Guru Nanak Dev* is under this *Raag*. The musicologists have determined the following features:

**Thaat:** *Mayamalavgaur-Karnatak Music Janak Mela*

**Vadi:** *Dha, Samvaadi: Re;*

Category: *Shadav-Vakr Sampooran*; time for singing: first part of the morning;

*Aroh: Sa Ga, Ma Pa Dha(Komal), , Ni Dha (Komal), Pa Sa;*

*Avroh: Sa Ni Dha (Komal), Pa, Ma Dha (Komal) Ma Pa, Ma Ga Re(Komal) Sa..*

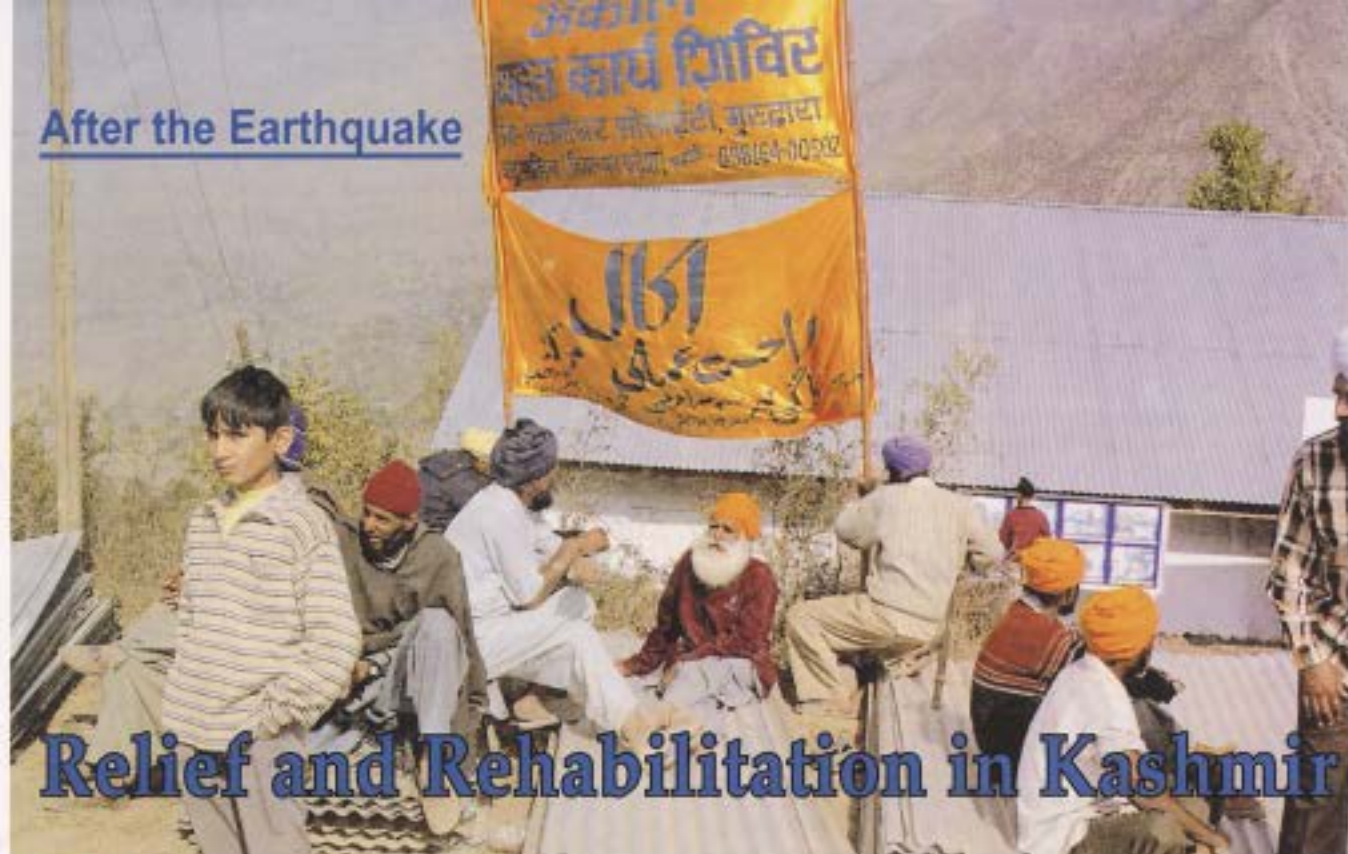
Catch Phrase: *Ni Dha (Komal), Pa, Ma Dha (Komal) Ma Pa, Ma Ga Re (Komal) Sa.*

All these are of great importance in the Sikh musical tradition. There is a close relationship between the *rasa*, *bhava* and character of the *Raag* and the meanings of the *Bani* composed in this *Raag*. The *Bani* of this *Raag* is meant to be sung in this *Raag* although many *Ragis* are taking liberty of singing this *Bani* in other *Ragaas* now days. ☺

Dr. Jagir Singh  
(From "Amrit Keertan" September 2003.  
Translated into English by P.S. Kohli.



## After the Earthquake



## Relief and Rehabilitation in Kashmir

Within days of the most devastating earthquake that hit north-western Kashmir and the adjoining areas of Pakistan on 8 October 2005, various Sikh organisations in India, Pakistan and the western world put their energies and resources together to rush aid and succour to the affected people and places. Many Sikh villages and Gurdwaras in the region were also majorly affected.

Great services were rendered in Kashmir by the *Kalgidhar Society* from Baru Sahib of district Sirmore in Himachal Pradesh whose volunteers in vehicles flying the Nishaan Sahib could be seen all along the Srinagar to Uri national highway, going past not only the villages and communities devastated by

the earthquake but still under great turbulence, with terrorists continuing to strike at will in this region, notwithstanding the enormous human tragedies.

The village Salamabad, just beyond Uri, was very badly hit by the earthquake and it was here that the Sikh volunteers first re-constructed all 94 houses destroyed with the main Jama Masjid provided with construction material and cash for its revival. The *Kalgidhar Society* has also offered to reconstruct another completely devastated mosque.

In village Naupura, between Uri and Urusa, the gurdwara there was also totally wrecked. After the *ardaas*, construction was started on 22 October with inauguration of the new building taking place



*Volunteers of the Kalgidhar Society at the earthquake-devastated villages beyond Uri in Kashmir.*





Volunteers carry building material for villages in Kashmir.



Damaged Gurdwara at Parampila on the Jhelum river.

on 7 November. Similarly the gurdwara in village Lagama was repaired while reconstruction of the Pandav temple began on 6 November and houses of all 85 Hindu families there re-built.

There are several Sikh villages in the Tangdhar area of Kupwara, some of them nestled along the hills, next to the LoC. The gurdwara and mosque at Tangdhar had been badly damaged and the Kalgidhar Society provided construction material and cash for both as also in villages Tribonia and Teetwal, where the homeless were provided with construction material.



Gurdwara at Tarboni village in Tangdhar.

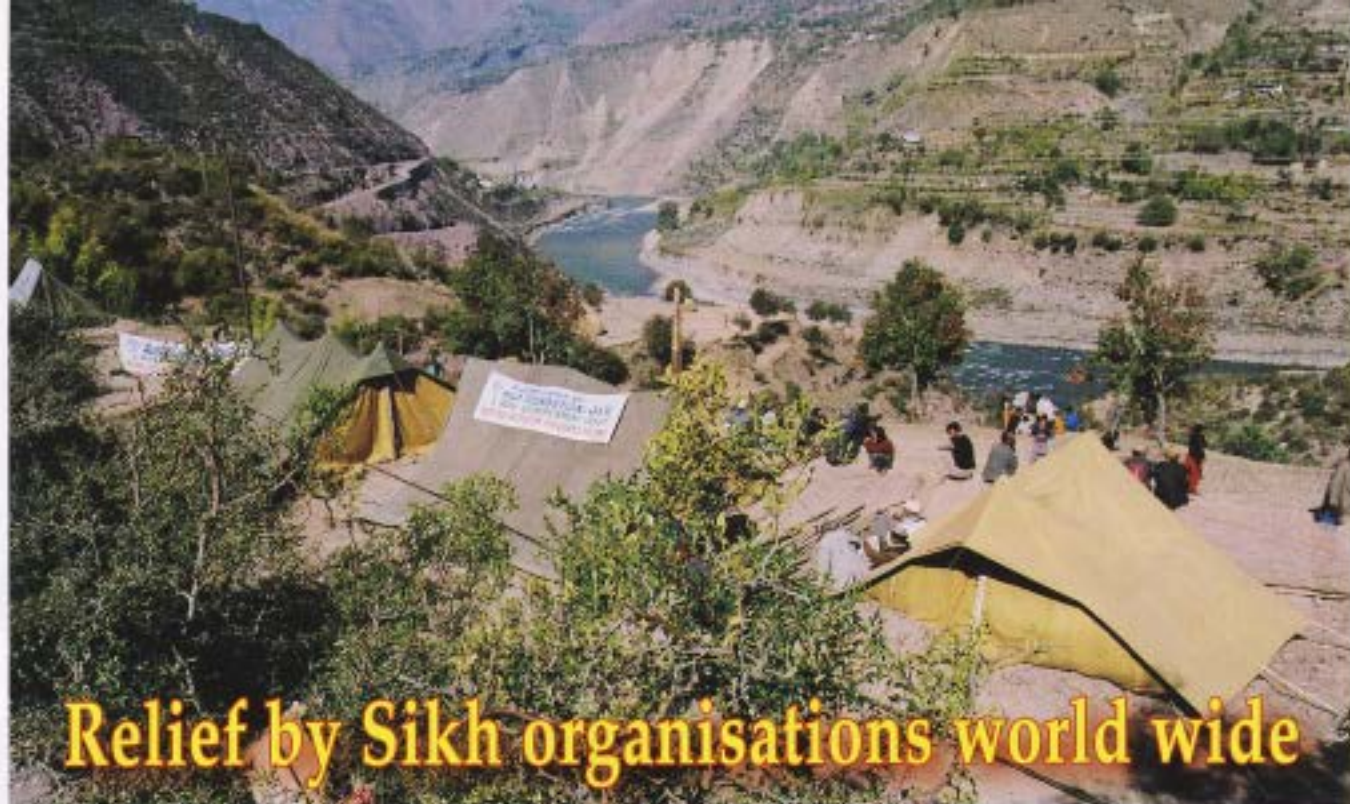


Volunteers of the Kalgidhar Society from Bara Sahib (H.P.) on the road past Baramulla, leading towards the LoC.

In villages Charunda and Bhatt Gran, along the LoC in Baramulla district, all 230 houses were given material for constructing kitchens and toilets while the local Middle Schools were provided with uniforms, shoes, books, stationary, satchels and play material. In a significant gesture, three Army barracks of the 12th Infantry Brigade at Uri were reconstructed, with the historic library-cum-training school building in process of reconstruction.

Apart from the above, the Kalgidhar Society have provided construction material to the villages of Jabla, Goalta, Sangnian, Kohalnia, Singhtun, Bara, Dardkote, Chakra, Dalanga, Eesham and Sultan Dhakki. Praying for "Sarbat da Bhalla", the Society performed *Ardaas* on the Aman Setu, the main LoC crossing between the two Kashmirs. ☪





## Relief by Sikh organisations world wide

*Relief supplies and tentage camp off the main road beyond Uri, on the southern bank of the Jhelum.*

The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee set up camps in Muzaffarabad and Badgram in PoK to provide relief to the quake-affected people there. Truckloads of relief material; including food, clothes and other necessities, left Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore for relief camps in PoK. A base camp was also established in Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdal, where donations from the Sikh community and Gurdwara committees from across the globe were received and sent onwards for further distribution.

The PSGPC president Mastan Singh said that the America Gurdwara Committee and DSGMC had offered to send donations. Meanwhile, *United Sikhs* – a non profit organisation working amongst the Sikhs across the globe – said it had deployed Ghanala earth-quake relief teams in the affected areas of both India and Pakistan. The organisation said a Ghanala earth-quake-relief base camp had been set up in the Uri and Kupwara districts.

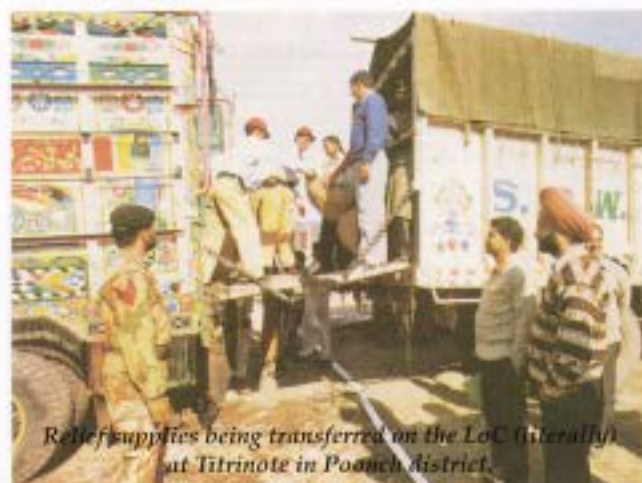
Another base camp was being set up in Pakistan at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, about 45 km from Rawalpindi, with the help of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) and the American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (AGPC). Efforts were also being made to set up similar base camps in other affected areas of northern Pakistan.

The earthquake, which occurred at 0930 IST on 8 October 2005, caused unprecedented damage to life and property in northern parts of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, with over 70,000 feared dead, thousands remaining buried and millions made homeless.

Quoting Kuldeep Singh Bali, president of the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee of Srinagar, *United Sikhs* said 13 Sikh families lost their homes and suffered injuries in Uri while another 150 Sikh families suffered damages in the Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir. Victims immediately needed dry rations, blankets, tents, medical supplies, plus financial help.

Walls of the historic Parampila Gurdwara (*Pathshahi Chhawan*) had collapsed and the Legaima Gurdwara had been completely destroyed.

United Sikhs procured emergency supplies such as high-altitude tents and woollen blankets from wholesale markets in Lahore, Delhi, Ludhiana and Amritsar. Jang Bahadur Singh, a professional chef, headed the *Langar* (free kitchen community) camps for the affected people in the Valley.

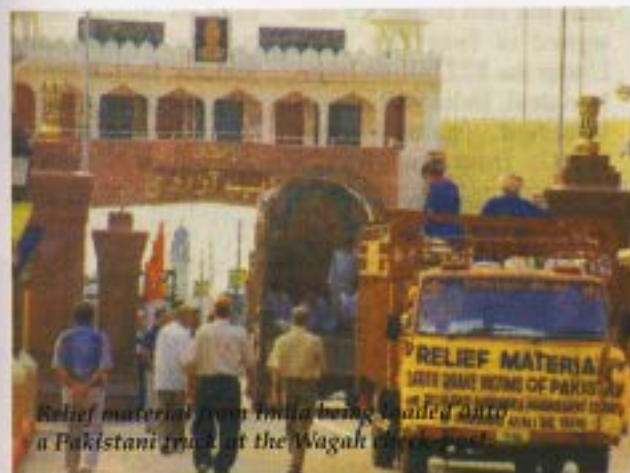


*Relief supplies being transferred on the LoC (literally) at Titrinote in Poonch District.*



## DSGMC send Relief to Pakistan

Six truck-loads of relief material (56 tonnes), containing blankets, polythene sheets, powder milk and tents, collected by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) for earthquake victims in Pakistan was sent to Pakistan via the Wagah joint check-post.



Relief material from India being loaded onto a Pakistani truck at the Wagah check-post.

It was on the intervention of Capt. Amarinder Singh, Chief Minister, Punjab, that Customs officials cleared two trucks to Pakistan while they said the rest of the relief material would be sent after the daily Retreat ceremony. Senior officials of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) and the Pakistan Evacuee Property Trust Board had to wait for several hours across the Wagah post to receive the relief material. Earlier, H.E. Mr Aziz Ahmad Khan, Pakistan's High Commissioner to India and Mr Mukhtar Hussain Tirmizi of the Pakistan High Commission flagged off the relief material for Pakistan at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj.

S. Paramjit Singh Sarna, the DSGMC head, said that apart from DSGMC members, the Dera of Baba Jagtar Singh and his followers Baba Amrik Singh had helped in collecting considerable relief material for Pakistan.



Pakistan's High Commissioner Aziz Ahmad Khan at Gurdwara Rakab Ganj in New Delhi after flagging off relief material to quake-hit Pakistan.

## Sikh Villages affected in Tangdhar

However, even two weeks after the quake struck large parts of Jammu and Kashmir, no aid had reached Tarbone and Sambalpura, two Sikh-dominated villages that snuggle close to a mountain in PoK. "All trucks carrying relief stop at Tangdhar", the Sikhs said. "We were minorities in Pakistan and thought India would be better when we crossed the border from Muzaffarabad. But for the J&K government, we still continue to be a minority, to be marginalised and ignored!"

Harbans Singh, said that whenever anyone from Tarbone and Sambalpura visited the relief collection centres set up by the government in Tangdhar, they were told their "number hasn't come! When will our turn come?" he questioned.

The people, however, maintain that though there is no politics involved in it, what the Sikhs are alleging is true. "There is no road that leads to the village", Sayyad Mir said in Tangdhar. "Perhaps that is why no aid has reached them", he added.

Mohammad Iqbal asked what was being heard all over J&K. "Where is all the aid going?" He added, "There are 20,000 quake affected houses in this region. The government says we will get a lakh each. After a few weeks, the total amount of money meant for us, coming from the Centre and international bodies, will be about Rs.1,000 crore. But how much will we get? Is anyone keeping track?"

## Sikh mission hire helicopters

"True to Sikh traditions, we will do everything possible to help the victims of the devastating earthquake that rocked North India and Pakistan on 8 October. If we have to hire helicopters to reach the victims with relief supplies, we will do so", says Baba Daljit Singh, founder-president of the International Human Welfare Sikh Mission. The Chicago-based Baba Daljit Singh said that efforts to collect medicines, blankets, woollens, dry food and other items of daily use were in full swing.

"We will start sending truckloads of relief material to quake-affected areas immediately", he said, revealing that "some volunteers of the mission were already in various affected in Kashmir collecting information on the devastation caused and the relief items needed".

He said that community kitchens would also be organised in areas where the number of affected families was large. "We are in touch with the Jammu and Kashmir Government. In whatever way the government needs us, we will try to extend all possible help as it is the aim of the mission to help those in distress", Baba Daljit Singh stated.

Meanwhile, the Chandigarh Nagrik Sabha had appealed to all households in that city to contribute at least one blanket or a sweater for the earthquake victims in Kashmir.



# The Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust & the Nagaara Trust host "The Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail" in New Delhi

*"British people are highly indebted and have been obliged to the Sikhs for a long time. I know that within this century we needed their help twice and they did help us very well. As a result of their timely help, we are today able to live with honour, dignity, and independence".*

Sir Winston Churchill

*"Of all the peoples of India, the Sikhs are perhaps the most travelled and best known in the West. Their handsome appearances, impressive beards and striking turbans, their valour and bravery as soldiers, tireless energy as workers and cheerful disposition have combined to make them something of a legend".*

W.G.Archer, former Keeper of the Indian Section, V&A Museum

These words, although written almost half a century back, illustrate the commonly held perception of the Sikhs, who are amongst one of the most easily recognised minorities in the world. Yet, despite their high visibility, what has remained little known about this community is the long and remarkable history which connects the Sikhs to Britain – a history, which is as evident on British shores as it is on the Indian sub-continent.

The Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail has been conceived to uncover the relatively unknown relationship between the Sikh and British nations. It is a unique project that promises to be a significant milestone in the promotion and preservation of shared heritage in the UK.

From rare and valuable early Sikh manuscripts, to the throne and sword of the legendary ruler Ranjit Singh, the cremation sites of Sikh soldiers who laid down their lives for Britain, the Trail provides a walk through the pages of history which will both inform and inspire: a voyage that starts in the plains of the Punjab and continues with the emergence of Sikhs as an integral part of modern Britain.

Included are some of the most stunning of palaces, stately homes and other places in Britain from a fresh perspective and in doing so, the history of one of Britain's most vibrant minorities is showcased.

Covering the length and breadth of Britain, the Trail acts as a gateway to a unique and valuable heritage which began in 1809 with a treaty of friendship between a sovereign Sikh nation and Britain and continues to this day. From world renowned sites in the heart of London to the Highlands of Scotland, the United Kingdom is home to a captivating heritage that forms part of the evocative and colourful historical mosaic that connects the Sikhs to Britain.

*The first Sikh  
in Britain:  
Maharaja  
Duleep Singh,  
in his youthful  
splendour.*



## The ASHT event at The British Council, New Delhi on 25th October 2005.



*S. Harbinder Singh Rana and  
S. Anup Singh welcome H.E.  
Sir Michael Arthur to the event.*



*Sir Michael Arthur being introduced to  
members of the MDSCT from the U.K.*



*S. Harcharan Singh Dugal, Sir Michael Arthur  
and Sarabjit Anup Singh at the Nishaan counter.*

The Nagaara Trust, in association with the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust held a reception followed by introductory talks on the genesis of the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail to a specially invited audience at the British Council in New Delhi on 25 October 2005.

The Prince of Wales had sent a message which was read out that evening: "The Prince of Wales was delighted to learn that you will be holding a reception to celebrate the achievements of the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail. His Royal Highness is so pleased that an idea which arose from the restoration of The Durbar Room at Osborne should have proved so successful, and it is particularly apt that the number of Sikh visitors to Osborne House has increased."

The Prince of Wales is delighted that the strong and varied links between the Sikhs and Britain over the last two hundred years have

been captured in this tangible and demonstrable way, which is so important if future generations are to understand our share of heritage. His Royal Highness sends his best wishes for the forthcoming event in Delhi and he hopes that it is a very successful occasion."

The Hon'ble Capt. Amarinder Singh of Patiala, Chief Minister of the Punjab, was to attend the event but owing to a Chief Minister's conclave elsewhere, instead sent his "very best wishes for a great success of the event."



*Mr Rod Pryde,  
Director of The British Council.*



*S. Anup Singh  
of The Nagaara Trust.*



*S. Tirlochan Singh,  
Chairman of the National  
Minorities Commission.*



*S. Yadwinder Singh, Chairman,  
Maharaja Duleep Singh  
Centenary Trust (MDSCT).*



*S. Harbinder Singh Rana  
of the MDSCT.*



*S. Harcharan Singh Dugal  
of The Nagaara Trust.*



*Sir Michael Arthur KCMG,  
High Commissioner of Britain.*



*S. Pushpinder Singh  
of The Nagaara Trust.*



It has yet to be fully realised that our community is a relatively recent immigrant population to reach North America; though the 18th century brought the first wave of Sikh immigrants to the U.S., it wasn't until the late 20th century that Sikh communities really established themselves across North America. Unless we recognise this migratory pattern, we cannot fully appreciate this year's second annual *Spinning Wheel Film Festival*. Whereas most film festivals focus on certain genres of films or specific themes, the *Spinning Wheel Festival* was broadly "Sikh", and necessarily so. Because we are such a young diasporic community, much of our history has yet to be discovered and documented. Consequently, any Sikh Film Festival – deliberately or not – would take on the task of displaying traditional historical narratives and atypical, even avant-garde, artistic films. For some, this combination is undesirable. For those of us who find ourselves on the margin of society, struggling to speak up and voice our story, this combination is almost delightful.

This year's festival, held at Hofstra University's Student Centre Theatre in Hempstead, New York, offered a mix of educational, informative, documentary, folkloric, artsy and entertaining films however that may have been better received if they

# Spinning Wheel: The Film Festival 2005, New York

by the Sikh Organization of New York (SONY), the Hofstra University of Long Island, New York, the International Punjabi Society and the Sikh Coalition and began with a banquet on 23 September 2005 at the Long Island Marriot. Presentations and feature films were shown amidst dinner and dancing.

Dr. Arvind-pal Singh Mandair, holder of the Sardarni Kuljeet Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh

Studies at Hofstra University in Long Island, NY announced the establishment of a new Sikh Studies Journal entitled *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture and Theory*. The journal is intended to provide an understanding of Sikhs, Sikhism and the Sikh Identity within the context of a new and dynamic setting that embraces globalisation, trans-nationalism and other related processes. Dr. Inderjeet Kaur, wife of late Yogi Harbhajan Singh, received "The Sewa Award", on behalf of her husband for his service, in a touching ceremony. *Lighthouse: A Film about Harbhajan Yogi Singh Ji* was shown, highlighting his achievements and life-story; Yogi Harbhajan - as a great international preacher-cum entrepreneur. A Canadian dance troupe, *Naachi Di Javani*, led by Iqbal Virk energised the ballroom with bhangra dances. Before the evening passed by in a delight of colourful dancing and music, Ekta Walia's film *Sikh, Rattle, and Roll* recounting a young Sikh's *dastaar bandhi* ceremony was featured.

Beginning on 24 September, films were presented over two days in four categories: *Introduction to the Sikh Tradition, Migration, Heroic Exploits and Memory and Trauma*. One thread ran throughout these

were presented according to age appropriateness. The event was jointly organized



The Film Festival's Poster.



Setting the pace: bhangra in the ballroom.



Harmeet S. Bharara, co-coordinator of the Film Festival.



categories: *Colonialism*. Pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial contexts were consistently present. Out of the 12 films presented, eight of the filmmakers were present. The film makers were eager to answer questions - some provided stirring accounts of how they discovered their subject matter, others provided general background information on issues their film raised, and all of them were open to new interpretations of their films and thankful for a fully seated audience.

Families with their children, elderly from the community, young teens and adults were all in attendance. Some films, such as *Kaya Taran* and *Sikhs and the City*, were not appropriate for all age groups and this caused some heart-aches for the festival organizers. But age-appropriateness was not the only source of resistance in the audience; it seemed as though some attendees were expecting to see their perspective of Sikhism and the Sikh life on screen and were disappointed, even offended, when their expectations were not met.

This subtle cultural undertone may not have been as apparent to others as it was to me. This is not because I am more astute than others. Instead it is likely a result of my gender identity. As a woman, I was disappointed by the festival's spread of films. The lack of gender representation in the films was truly unfortunate. In my experience as a Sikh woman, it is not possible to fully understand a male's struggle without understanding a female's struggle and vice versa. While all hinted at a female's journey and unfolded some deeper cultural issues, most of the films focused on men or male issues from a political standpoint. As a minority population in North America, the political boundaries of our past, present and future are necessary focal points. However to better achieve our political goals, I think our community would benefit from more dialogue on the cultural barriers that we face and the cultural

barriers we create; what often lies behind many political quandaries are deeper cultural barriers.

*Continuous Journey* began to break down some of these barriers. The film raised the question of "Empire" - questioning Britain's political definition of Empire which, in theory, should have allowed Sikhs on the *Komagatamaru* to disembark with no strife. What prevented Sikhs from reaching land and becoming Canadian citizens were not political garbs but rather cultural barriers of racism and orientalism. This stalemate of homeland - the clash of the Sikh struggle, the struggle for independence, imperialism, racism, etc - was beautifully portrayed in *Continuous Journey*. And what I will remember most about this film is the story untold behind the adventurous men, so willing and ready to die for a place to call "home". The story behind these men is the women that they left behind and the tremendous sacrifices those women - mothers, wives, sisters - had to make to stay alone and raise a family, knowing they may never see their men again.

While each film beamed brilliance on its intended subject matter just as *Continuous Journey* did, the spread of chosen films was still restrictive. This is not to say that the filmmakers should have offered more female characters or that there should have been a politically correct, "equal" representation of male and female. Instead I am raising a question of agency and representation on behalf of the Sikh community. I mention this gender discrepancy because, for me, it reflects our community's unfortunate tendency to be male focused and male dominant. I want to know why, when my faith tells me I am just as important and just as equal as a man, my women remain silent and in the background.

Two of the three films (*Sikhs: Part One and Sewa: From Paris to Tapovan*) in the "Introduction to the Sikh Tradition" segment did not narrate a female



Dr. Warren Frisina, Head of the Department of Religion at Hofstra University.

T. Sher Singh, of the Spinning Wheel from Toronto.

Satjivan Singh Khalsa.





Bibi Inderjeet Kaur.

experience. In the "Migration" segment, *Sikhs and the City* was the only film of three to feature both female and male biographies. None of the films in "Heroic Exploits" (*Dastaar: Defending Sikh Identity*, *Ranjit Singh*, *Sikhs in World Wars*, and *Sahibzadey*) included a female perspective. *Sahibzadey* was an invigorating

animation that could have been easily put to a female voice or narration because of its target audience: children and young adults. *Kaya Taran* and *Khamosh Pani*, in the "Memory and Trauma" segment, dealt a little more with female characters but still did not put them at the forefront in lead roles and central themes.

Both the lack of gender representation and the resistance some attendees had to new perspectives, bring us to a similar "stalemate of homeland" that Sikhs faced on the *Komagatamaru*. Though we are not nearly in such a desperate position, we are in a stalemate of homeland because just like those Sikhs we are not only outside of our ancestor's homeland where we are no longer welcome but now we find ourselves in a new land that we do not accept, understand or embrace as our own. With each voice we reject and ignore in the community, we move further into this stalemate.

For such a young and growing community it is remarkable that we are able to organise such a film festival and draw a sizable audience to the event. I ask though that we attend these events as a community; we must move beyond heroes and holidays and begin to critically question ourselves and the world around us. We must be willing to risk the comfort of our daily lives to do this for we must be willing to tolerate dissent, ambiguity, and uncertainty. I do not believe that our community can stand together as a *sangat* if we are unable to accept the different ways Sikhs live their lives and experience the faith. After all, this year's filmmakers have shown us that a good film is one that presents a factual or popular narrative that works towards a revision, a re-

enactment or a new perspective by shedding light on the undocumented, invisible, liminal...bringing privilege to the downtrodden...and forcing history's victors to take off their hats...

Nina Chanpreet Singh

Nina is a student of global history at Barnard College and now in her final year. After graduation, she hopes to create a career out of what she loves most: storytelling. To do this, she will continue her community service activities and complete graduate studies in history and psychology. Nina believes that exchange of stories can make the world a better place because it fosters healing, understanding and compassion.



Teji and Ishar Singh Bindra, the son & father.

**The Sikh Organization of New York (S.O.N.Y)** works to spread knowledge about Sikhism and the Sikh identity and encourages political, social and civil leadership in the area. The International Punjabi Society joined S.O.N.Y. in sponsoring this year's film festival. **The Sikh Coalition** ([www.sikhcoalition.org](http://www.sikhcoalition.org)) is a community-based organisation that defends civil rights and civil liberties in the United States, educates the broader community about Sikhs and diversity, promotes local community empowerment, and fosters civic engagement amongst Sikh Americans. The Coalition serves as a resource for all organizations and individuals as well as a point of contact for the Sikh people. Because the Coalition is the only organisation of its kind for Sikhs in New York and provides legal services to clients across North America, it most appropriately supported this year's film festival.



# Moral and Ethical Precepts: Values in Sikhism

While Sikhism does not have a formal statement akin to the Ten Commandments, it does have numerous precepts in the Sikh Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. These provide rich source of ethical and moral guidance to individuals concerning the spiritual and temporal aspects of life on this earth. Sikhism considers spiritual and temporal aspects as two sides of the same coin. Sikh Gurus propounded a "holistic" or a "total systems" approach to life by recognising the inter-relatedness and interdependence of spiritual, social, economic and political matters in life. By linking these dimensions, Sikh Gurus discarded the notion of dividing the spiritual and temporal into watertight compartments. Instead, the Gurus treated these four factors as circles that intersect each other thus signifying the compounding nature of these influences on human struggle for existence. Of course, Sikh teachings stress that spiritually inspired morals and ethics must triumph over social, economic and political matters. Sikhism, accordingly, can be described as a *Way of Life* i.e. something that must be lived and experienced on a daily basis in every sphere of human activity rather than something which may be observed through ritualistic practices.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. The founder of Sikhism was Nanak. Born in 1469 in present day Pakistani Punjab, Guru (teacher) Nanak was a mystic who travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East spreading a simple message; "there is one God and all people are His creation and hence equal." He rejected that aspect of religion which dealt in ritual and superstition and denounced the prevailing system in India under which the accident of birth of a person determined his or her

status in life. Guru Nanak preached that it was the deeds or behaviour of a person that determined the net worth of an individual and not in whose house he or she was born. Guru Nanak stated in unequivocal terms that women are equal to men and have an equal share in all rights and privileges of a civil society. Sikh women have, as a result, enjoyed rights similar to men through the centuries. This is how Guru Nanak spoke about women in one of his hymns.

*Of women are we born, of women conceived,  
To woman betrothed and wedded;  
Women we befriend, by her continues the human race;  
When woman dies, woman is sought, for it is she who  
maintains world order.  
Why revile her of whom are born the great?  
Of woman is born another woman; none exists  
without her;  
The Eternal God, says Nanak, is the only One not born  
of her.*

SGGS p.473

Although no fixed date is assigned to when he commenced his preaching, it is generally accepted that by the time Guru Nanak was in his early twenties, he had garnered a significant following among the people.

Spanning a period of over 200 years, the Sikh faith evolved under the personal guidance of ten human gurus – Guru Nanak was the first and Guru Gobind Singh was the last. Guru Nanak personally selected one of his disciples as his successor by elevating him to be the next Guru while stepping down as the teacher. Guru Nanak bowed to his successor's authority as the new Guru. This process



was subsequently repeated by all the succeeding Gurus.

Before his passing in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh declared that he would be the last of the human teachers. He had concluded that the Sikh community of the day had achieved a measure of spiritual and temporal maturity such as to sustain itself as per the ideals taught by the Gurus. He declared that henceforth, all Sikhs shall look upon their Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, as their teacher in eternity. Since then, Sikhs have given great reverence towards the Holy Book as a Guru in every day life.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, compiled the first edition of the Sikh Holy Book in 1604. It contains the writings of the first five Sikh Gurus and thirty six Hindu and Muslim divines and saints belonging to various parts of the Indian subcontinent. These non-Sikh writings range from the 12th to the 16th centuries. In fact some of them had predeceased the founder Guru. Collectively the non-Sikh writings constitute about one sixth of fifty nine hundred hymns in the Holy Book. Writings of Hindus and Muslims were included because there was a commonality of approach of religious philosophy and outlook between the Gurus and these divines and saints. The Sikh Gurus regarded all great truths the property of the human race and not restricted to a particular faith. Incorporation of writings of non-Sikh in the Sikh scripture attests to the universal outlook of the Sikh Gurus affirming the non-monopolistic and non-exclusive nature of the Sikh approach to spirituality.

The original hand written version which was signed by the Fifth Guru is still intact and is part of the community archives. The first completed copy was installed ceremoniously by the Fifth Guru at the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar in Punjab, India on 30 August 1604. Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, added a number of hymns of the Ninth Guru to the original compilation in 1706. This final version of the Guru Granth Sahib consists of 1430 pages and is written in Gurmukhi, the script of the Punjabi language. The entire Granth is in poetic form which is why Sikh prayer services consist of hymn singing in the classical North Indian musical tradition.

The main themes of the Guru Granth Sahib are:

- Search for God the Creator.
- The means to reach God.
- How to realise God. Relationship between man and the Creator.
- Rules for interacting with fellow human beings.
- Rules of morality in everyday life.
- Sikh theology.

The key teachings or fundamental precepts of the Sikh faith are:

- Belief in one God, the Creator of this universe. God is without form or gender. As the Creator, He is part of His Creation in spirit but does not take birth. By laws of nature, every form of life on this earth must come to an end. Hence God is never born. He never incarnates Himself in human or any other form. Therefore, worship of images or idols is forbidden in Sikhism. He is self-existent and not subject to time. God is transcendental and immanent.

- Remembering God at all times, every day while conducting various activities of daily life. This is called being "God conscious" and accepting that there is a higher being or Divine Will that controls this world and every thing in it including all life. Guru Nanak says that whosoever learns to abide by this becomes adept in the art of living. Ability to recognise the Divine Will comes only when the individual has learned to harness or dispense with his or her ego. Ego is what makes a person self-centered and which alienates the individual from the Creator. This is the root cause of all the problems of life and human suffering. In the case of an ordinary person, his or her self-centeredness leads to aggressiveness, violence and exploitation of the weak. These evil tendencies find full expression through the five main vices i.e. lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride. Egoists live in a world of their own forgetting the real purpose of life under these bad influences. Guru Nanak holds truthful living higher than truth. The Guru said that truthful living should become the highest ideal of life for every individual. Individuals can achieve this ideal by conscious actions to live a moral and ethical life. Individuals in this category have been described in Sikh thought as God-oriented as opposed to the self-



centered individual. Sikhism says that without strict ethical purity of conduct, there is no possibility of any advance in the religious experience. A religious life not properly grounded in ethical conduct or a religious discipline which ignores the ethical requirements is considered grossly in error. Says Nanak, "The seeds of the teachings of the Guru cannot germinate except in the field of ethical conduct, constantly irrigated by the waters of the truth".

- Sharing with the less fortunate in the community at large and doing community service or *Seva* without seeking any reward or recognition in return. Doing *Seva* is a way of affirming basic humanity among all regardless of any distinctions. *Seva* is the essence of pure spirituality. Says Nanak on page 26 of the Holy Book, "If we serve humanity in this world, then we would be welcomed in the court of God".

- Every able bodied Sikh is enjoined to earn his/her living through honest means and avoid becoming a parasite or a burden on society while being an able-bodied person. Earning one's livelihood through honest means is an assertion of self-dignity, self-respect and uprightness of character. Dignified individuals are the backbone of a decent and civilised society.

- A good life is lived as part of a community by living honestly and caring for others particularly the underprivileged. Sikhs are enjoined to give ten percent of their earnings or equivalent in time for this purpose. A caring society is a humane society.

- Stand up for justice for all with emphasis on offering protection to the poor and the oppressed and opposing their exploitation by stronger segments of society.

- All humans are born equal. No one can claim special status on account of birth, skin colour, ethnicity, nationality and gender etc.

- This is a hymn from the Sikh Scripture attesting to the universality of humankind:

*The Lord first created the light:*

*From the Lord's play all living creatures came,*

*And from the Divine Light the whole creation sprang.*

*Why then should we divide humans into high and low creatures.*

*Brother, be not in error:*

*Out of the Creator the creation comes:*

*Everywhere in creation the Creator is:*

*The Lord's spirit is all-pervading!*

*The Lord, the Maker, has molded one mass of clay into  
Vessels of diverse shapes.*

*Free from taint are all the vessels of clay*

*Since free from taint is the Divine Potter.*

SGGS p.1349

In imparting the above teachings, all ten Sikh Gurus expounded the message of universal love and equality towards all, regardless of an individual's faith tradition as a pathway for achieving spirituality. It was emphatically stressed by the Gurus that individuals should continuously strive to become more and more perfect in daily life. Sikh teachings recommend that one should live an active life in this world but still not be of the world. In other words, the individual is asked to follow a middle path called *Sehaj* by remaining detached while still leading a normal life in society. This is further explained through the metaphor of a lotus which blooms in muddy waters from which it obtains its sustenance while managing to keep itself clean of the mud. Another way to communicate this idea is that one should be of this world without being worldly.

Contemporary life under the influence of globalisation, the mass media, instant communication systems, hedonistic lifestyles and conspicuous consumption patterns have made it increasingly difficult to foster a life of *Sehaj* and spirituality. The pressures to conform are too great. In the end analysis, each individual must decide which path to pursue as leading a religious life is a matter of choice.

**Manjit Singh**

*[Manjit Singh teaches Sikhism in the  
Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University,  
Montreal. Presently, he is the President of the  
Interfaith Council of Montreal].*



# Sikh Values: Tried, Tested & True

An exploration of Sikh values and their operative presence throughout the trials and tribulations of the 18th and 19th centuries.

**D**espite Sikhism's relatively recent history, the cessation of Guruship could have posed an immediate threat to prosperity of the religion. "Strict guidance over a long period of time in words as well as in deeds when merging to form a new society", Gopal Singh argues, "is a crucial requirement in ensuring its success and durability." Such a threat though, as the events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries elucidate, was never brought to fruition. Had the values espoused by the Guru's not resonated so deeply and absolutely with their followers, this threat, along with other external forces working against the new religion, would have inevitably posed an insurmountable obstacle to its flourishing and future.

In his article, *The Values as Operative in Sikh Way of Life*, Dr. Santokh Singh argues that the test in determining if certain values are accepted as values by a given group is to see whether they have become operative and effective in their minds and consequently in their actions and whether the values have found embodiment in the institutions of that people. "No class of people", he continues, "will put in their collective effort to realise a certain value unless they believe, at least to an extent, in the certainty of its achievement." In articulating the Sikh values as espoused by Guru Nanak and his nine successors and in contextualising the events that transpired in the Punjab over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, this article argues that Sikh values, in spite of the absence of any formal spiritual leadership of a living Guru, did remain operative and effective not only in Sikh minds but in their actions and relationships amongst themselves and others.

## Sikh Value: Equality

Underlying Guru Nanak's and his nine successors' emphasis on recognising equality amongst human beings, regardless of creed, race, class, caste, or sex, is the understanding that man's essential self is Divine. Upon looking at fellow human beings, whether they be Sikh, Muslim, Christian, male or female, a Sikh recognises in them not only the divine light of God, but they recognise themselves as a consequence of their belief in the oneness of God. Consequently, Guru Nanak rejected the religious implications of the caste system primarily because it stood for a practical denial that God is one and is the creator and sustainer of all life. As a result, Guru Nanak and his nine successors denounced the system, teaching that all people are equal before God, including all castes as well as women. "It is from women that men are born", Guru Nanak emphasised, "and are therefore worthy of equal respect." Each Guru consistently emphasised that there exists no high, no low, no dark, no fair, no privileged and no caste. All are equal to one another both in political rights and in religious aspirations. In light of the value placed on equality, Guru Nanak was concerned with advancing the life conditions of those who were the targets of structural inequality and violence. He opposed tyranny and was vehemently against exploitation. To regard all others as equals, he believed and imparted on others, is the highest religion.

## Sikh Value: Seva

Of Guru Nanak's three fundamental teachings including *Nam Japo* (remembering God), *Kirt Karo* (earning one's living honestly), and *Wand Chako* (the ethic of charity and sharing), it is the third of his teachings that will be given particular emphasis here.



God has blessed people with different abilities, yet regardless, Guru Nanak believed, it is a basic human right to have shelter and food. If these could not be acquired through one's own faculties, they ought to at least be fulfilled through the benevolence and charity of others, through sharing. The value of *sewa*, or service to others, elucidates this fundamental teaching. From the inception of Sikhism, one underlying idea sustaining the religion has been **service to mankind**. In fact, Sikhism came into being for the sake of service to those who were suffering. Whether the service was in the form of spiritual, social, political, or military assistance, it was always the idea of service to humanity that prompted the Sikh Gurus to adopt a certain course of action resulting in ameliorating the conditions of the people. Thus, care of the needy has always been regarded as an important form of charity, undertaken by Guru Nanak himself in his efforts in healing lepers and other sick people. Guru Angad Dev further put this value into practice through his introduction of such initiatives as the institution of *langar* (community kitchen).

### Sikh Value: Democracy

Prior to the institutionalisation of the Khalsa order by Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak emphasised the significance of congregation, believing that man cannot live alone in isolation from society. He argued in favour of the formation of a social group, which, by practicing a common moral code, would be a cohesive unit. This, he maintains, would add to the strength of the group to face opposition. Guru Nanak further emphasised a democratic idea when he enjoined upon the monarch to rule with the help of the representatives of his subjects in the discharge of his administrative functions and acquit himself in all fairness and justice, kindness and sympathy. Because social phenomenon is, in essence, at one with the Supreme Reality according to Sikh philosophy, the social structure inherently necessitates a moral order to prevail. Human social relations, therefore, require the expression of the values of equality, love, justice and self-respect, in appreciation of this collective essence. Guru Gobind Singh envisioned such an ideal structure and the institutionalisation of the Khalsa Panth was the realisation of this ideal. The Khalsa Order is an order of saint-soldiers who would lead a spiritually pious and enlightened life while simultaneously striving for the socio-political

liberation of the oppressed and exploited. Where the Khalsa, as an individual, means a truly and socially realised self committed to morally responsible action, in its collective form Khalsa represents the model of the ideal socio-political structure which extends the scope and significance of human action and behaviour to include a recognition of social ramifications while simultaneously working toward the alleviation of social injustice.

### Sikh Value: Just Rule

Monarchy, the well established and accepted form of government during the Gurus' lifetimes, was considered by them to be God-given and when they criticised it in their writings or in open addresses, they did not criticise the institution as such, but only found faults with mode and manner of its functioning. The Gurus held that kingship was a gift from God, and authority, in every sphere, ultimately derives its validity from Him and not from any human source. Accordingly, they continually stressed that the Kings should be dispensers of justice and equity. The Gurus held that kingship was a gift from God and authority, in every sphere, ultimately derives its validity from Him and not from human source. Accordingly, they continually stressed that the Kings should be dispensers of justice and equity. Guru Nanak felt that bowing down to oppression was cowardice as it encouraged the prolongation of injustice and cruelty towards the weak and the helpless. He never accepted the idea that the kings were independent to act according to their whims regardless of their responsibility to their subjects. He was of the view that if the political authority digresses from its real functions, God in his anger might chastise the king by depriving him of his political power. It is in God's power to degrade the Sultan just as it is in His power to exalt the man. According to the Gurus, a King's failure to function to the advantage and welfare of his subjects allows the people the legitimate right of disobedience and rebellion against him. The people's exercise of the right to rebellion thereby becomes a religious duty for the reason that injustice and oppression are unacceptable to God. Finally, Guru Nanak condemned earthly pursuit and did not entertain any respect for the possession of riches and social position or power. Accordingly, he condemned the fighting and the exploitation initiated by rulers for the sake of the amelioration of their own personal wealth.



### Translation of the text from Persian:

"O firmament of love, of knowledge, the guide of ascetics, the manifestation of divine light, the opener of the gates of knowledge, one who has climbed the stages of gnosis, the ascender of the heavenly heights, the revealer of the subtle secrets of the Being, the knower of the mysteries of the visible and invisible worlds, the pilgrim of the world of angels and spirits, the summit of guidance, the luminous guide of the stars in the sky, one who has crossed the oceans of devotion, the faithful elect of the heavenly Court, the beauty spot on the face of the loved one, O epiphany of the divine attributes, shadow of the absolute essence, connoisseur of the realities of the nine celestial thrones, king of the chosen — these are the attributes of the Guru Sahib, Guru Nanak."

### THE TEN MASTERS, FROM GURU NANAK TO

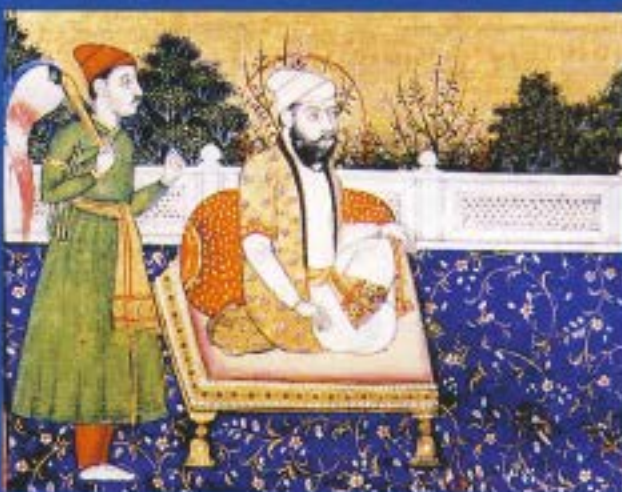
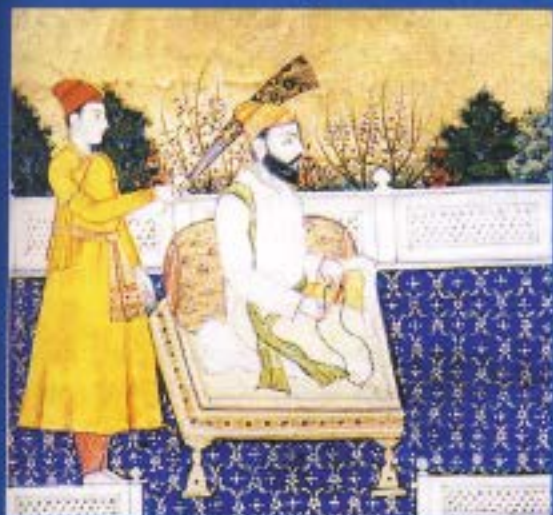


Illustrations in the Persian manuscript *Gulgashat-i-Punjab*.

Clockwise from left: Guru Nanak, Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das, Guru Ram Das.



GURU GOBIND SINGH, AS DEPICTED BY ARTISTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



Clockwise from left:

Guru Arjan, Guru Har Gobind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan, Guru Teg Bahadur, Guru Gobind Singh.



## Sikh Value: Just War

"When all efforts to restore peace prove useless and no words avail, lawful is the flash of steel".

When Mughal policy began to alienate the Sikhs and there began violent unrest, Guru Hargobind acted upon the advice of his father to arm himself and his followers, responding to the changed needs of the time. The practice of taking up arms, nevertheless, was very restricted within the parameters of formal rules and criterion which determined the appropriate use of force, as set by Guru Arjan. These five conditions included the use of arms only as a last resort, never to be waged for the purpose of revenge, absence of looting and annexing of territory, made up of soldiers committed to the cause and finally the provision that the minimum of force should be used to achieve the objective.

## Context: The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Centuries

Thus, before the eighteenth century, the Gurus had evolved the basic framework of the political ethics for the Sikhs, and it served as the chief source of inspiration and guidance for the Sikh community in the subsequent period. The eighteenth century was a period of great political upheaval and turmoil in the Punjab, a prolonged drama of constant battle, foreign invasion and internal conflict. The Mughals, the Marathas and the Afghans strove with each other for supremacy and their mutual fighting produced conditions of utter confusion and anarchy until the end of the century, when Ranjit Singh occupied Lahore and laid the foundation of a new state at dawn of the nineteenth century.

Sikhs suffered continual oppression almost entirely throughout the eighteenth century and there were moments when their persecutors thought they had successfully extirpated the whole sect. During this period the Mughals had vowed to crush Sikh existence, outlawing Sikhism and ordering the deaths of all its followers. In 1735, the Sikhs were cut off from their main source of inspiration, the Harmandir at Amritsar, when it was taken possession of and guarded by Mughal troops to prevent them from visiting it. The year 1745 brought about what is known in Sikh history as a *Ghallughara* or holocaust, in a disheartening

incident that brought about the deaths of seven thousand Sikhs. In 1762, what is known as "The Great Killing" occurred, killing fifteen thousand Sikhs at the hands of the Mughal invaders. In light of these atrocities, the identification of operative Sikh values during this period is especially commendable.

## Sikh Values At Work:

*"If the value has been apprehended truly, it will sometime or the other get translated into its realisation on a practical plane."*

If there were ever a time to test the strength of an commitment to the Sikh values, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would certainly qualify as the prime contender for two reasons. The first reason is the fact that this era immediately followed the period of the Gurus, leaving Sikhs 'on their own' (with the Guru Granth nevertheless) to uphold their spiritual ideals. The second reason is the enormous challenges the Sikhs would encounter during these years, facing oppression, massacre and brutality at the hands of rabid invaders whose primary aim it was to annihilate the Sikh value system. Not only were Sikhs facing enough of a challenge with the first reason, they had a force working directly against them to make certain that the Sikh values did not survive. In identifying the active presence of each of the five values outlined above in the 18th and 19th Centuries, it will become obvious that these challenges to the Sikh value system were not only met, they were vigorously overcome by the Sikh congregation and their leading figures.

## Sikh Value: Democracy

What impelled the Sikh confederacies to united action during the battles of the eighteenth century was their faith in the common destiny of the Khalsa. The Khalsa ideals served as the resplendent beacon light for the Sikh chiefs, declaring themselves the humble servants of the *Panth*, subservient to its will. Every leader had to be baptised (*amrit*) and all had to adopt the code of conduct (*rahit*) of the Khalsa and abide by it. The Gurus had enjoined upon the Sikhs to take their decisions through panchayats or councils and all of the important decisions relating to common interests of the community were to have the approval of those for whom they were meant. In accordance, the Sikh chiefs were alive



to the democratic ideals inculcated by the Gurus and they followed them to the best of their power, acting in compliance with the expectation to rule in consultation with their counsellors which would have necessarily been facilitated through their embedded capacity to recognise themselves in, and identify with, their subjects. Without exception, all the Sikh rulers regarded themselves as the servants of the Khalsa commonwealth and were known for their love of justice.

In the Sikh political philosophy, the idea of monarchy had never been considered as anti-Sikh and it was never rejected or condemned by the Gurus. Therefore, the development of kingship among the Sikhs was not taken as a radical departure from the Sikh political ideology. Themselves victims of the worst kind of religious tyranny, the leaders of the Sikh *misls* established a just and humane rule upon having conquered territories during the fierce fighting of this period, giving full expression to the Sikh value of forgiveness and empathy. They treated the Muslims generously and made no distinctions among their subjects on the grounds of caste or religion. The 'raison d'être' of the Sikh State was justice and this meant that the ruler should not appropriate to himself what is not his by right and he should not permit others to do so either. In addition this meant that the ruler should institute a department of charities, taking care that no one in his kingdom was without food and dress. In his domain, the ruler should maintain equality of welfare, ensuring that none are jobless and by looking into the condition of each individual. Being the guardian of his subjects, it was understood, he must always look to their welfare. In addition, the concepts of peace, order, security and justice should be regarded as the fundamental aims of the state.

The following leading Sikh personalities during this period demonstrate the practical application of such ideals.

### **Banda Singh**

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, this Sikh leader, in the face of edict for wholesale annihilation of the Sikhs, did not stray from the principles of his faith and maintained an attitude of tolerance towards Muslims throughout. For any Muslim who approached him, he fixed a

daily allowance and wage and made sure to look after him. Without any dejection or shame, he rode into battle calm, cheerful, even anxious to die the death of a martyr.

### **Kapur Singh**

The prominent Sikh leader of the eighteenth century, Nawab Kapur Singh led the Sikhs through this dark period by his example and bold leadership, implementing into Sikh minds the idea of political sovereignty. When Zakariya Khan became governor of Lahore in 1726 and launched a severe policy against the Sikhs, Kapur Singh headed a band of warriors who targeted government treasuries and caravans. This had such an effect that the government was soon obliged to make terms with them and in 1733 the government lifted the quarantine forced upon them. He was so humble that he always thought of his position among his people to be a gift from them rather than the result of any qualities he possessed. Kapur Singh led the Sikhs through their most trying times while maintaining irreproachable moral standards.

### **Ranjit Singh**

The nineteenth century Maharaja, Ranjit Singh, was imbued with a genuine respect for the Sikh scriptures and the Sikh religion. He spent a substantial amount of his fortunes on the maintenance of religious institutions and visited the Golden Temple at least twice a year. The taxes he imposed were fair and he ensured that whatever was collected went back to the people. His coins bore the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, elucidating his observance and devotion to the Gurus as those for whom he ruled and from whom his rulership was bestowed. Regardless of his devotion to the Sikh faith, he never contemplated imposing Sikhism on others as the state religion, fulfilling the teaching of equality and tolerance propounded by the Gurus. Furthermore, he built for himself no glorious throne, contenting himself with a small chair, sometimes only a cot and wore no crown nor any other distinctive royal headdress, fulfilling the value the Gurus placed on humility and on the ruler's capacity to identify himself equally with his subjects. Such identification was further manifest through his readiness to face punishment for a moral lapse on his part. Submitting himself



before the congregation, he confessed his guilt for riding an elephant in the company of a dancing girl through the streets of Lahore. At the last moment he was spared punishment of flogging in view of his honouring the authority of the congregation despite his position as Maharaja. Ranjit Singh believed his position was a gift from the Guru and his constant endeavour was to give each and every Sikh the sense of participation in the government of the State, fulfilling the Guru's value placed on democratic government. In addition, he abolished capital punishment, a step not yet taken even by modern day democracies.

The Sikhs had, in the first half of the eighteenth century, suffered considerably at the hands of the fanatical Mughal rulers of the Punjab. Nevertheless, when the Sikh rulers took over control of the religion, they were not revengeful nor intolerant to the Muslims. What they had disliked in the Mughal government, they would not do themselves. They soon forgot the wounds inflicted on them in the recent past, as was in keeping with the traditions of their Gurus.

### **Sikh Value: Equality**

In respect to their duties toward the Khalsa, no Sikh including the chiefs, could pose to be above or considered superior to the entire body of the community. The *amrit* had elevated them all to the same level and made them members of the same casteless Khalsa fraternity. No sardar could ever think that he belonged to a different category and was destined by God to rule over others and exercise and enjoy some special rights. The Khalsa Panth, in this sense, served as a levelling mechanism, guaranteeing that no Sikh consider himself above the rest. Furthermore, under the influence of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the Sikhs had disregarded all caste distinctions in the matter of the origin, growth and development of the Sikh *misl*s. No *misl* was named after any caste of any chief. Moreover, the Sikh chiefs ungrudgingly appointed Muslims and other non-Sikhs to responsible positions, giving practical expression to the Gurus emphasis on forgiveness and tolerance. Ranjit Singh, for example, wanted to make Hindus and Muslims feel that they comprised as much the people of the land as the Sikhs. He took advice from ministers who were from the ranks of all communities and placed his government on a

broad basis of fellowship and cooperation with all communities. His policies were not aimed at the elevation of one community at the cost of others, as his predecessors had aimed, but at the well being of all. To bring about emotional integration across the various religions, important festivals of all communities were jointly and officially celebrated. He believed that he must live up to the teachings of the Gurus and therefore must be just, honest and benign and in recognising all humanity as one. In addition to disregarding the distinctions between castes, the Sikh chiefs and rulers of the period similarly disregarded the distinctions between genders. Guru Nanak had preached equality and respect toward women and his observations in favour of women went a long way in getting them an honourable status and share in the various fields of Sikh life. For example, the Sikh maharanis (queens) actively participated in state affairs and occasionally took charge of state administration. In addition, they were known to take up arms in battle in defence of their homes and family, a considerable feat in light of the times.

### **Sikh Value: Seva**

The Sikh Sardars always kept before them the motto that "service of humanity is the service of God" and were well known for seva of the Gurdwaras and other holy places. The Sikh chiefs always maintained their free kitchens to supply food to the poor and the needy and they paid special attention to this part of the service in the event of a famine. The famine of 1783 occurred in Budh Singh's time and he is said to have sold all of his property and to have fed the people with grain from the proceeds. The first request made by Kapur Singh upon his nomination as Nawab representative was that he should not be deprived of his old privilege of serving in the community kitchen. During the fighting in the eighteenth century, one Mughal, attesting to the Sikh congregations devotion to the value of service, declared "there are Sikhs in this world who would not eat until they have fed their brethren. They may themselves go without clothes and food, but cannot bear their comrades distress. They will do the roughest chores to earn a small wage for their sake". In the nineteenth century, during Ranjit Singh's rule, he is said to have given away one tenth of the state revenues to numerous charities.



## Sikh Value: Just War

The Gurus placed a high standard of war morality before the Sikhs and consequently the Sikh chiefs never harassed the old, infirm or women in times of war. When they captured Afghanis during the battles of the eighteenth century, they refrained from causing any harm to women, instead sending them away to safety. The Sikh sardars who were so well known in the art of war were no less adept in the art of peace, attested to in the writings of one of their Mughal enemies, Qazi Nur Muhammad. In his writings he cannot help but proclaim the Sikhs' natural virtues: "They are courageous like lions. If you wish to learn the art of war, come face to face with them in the field. They are like lions in battle, and, in times of peace, they surpass Hatim in generosity." His words reveal the defensive nature of Sikh warfare, prepared to take up arms as a response to threat only, admitting that in times of peace not only would they refrain from initiating battle, they displayed kindness toward the offending groups.

*"Bodies may be governed externally, but hearts cannot be."*

The Sikhs sanctified this period of their history with deeds of unparalleled sacrifice and courage and the Sikh character presented in this testing time in truest aspect. They brought into full play the great qualities of service to humanity, clemency, forgiveness, humility, justice, equality, liberalism and respect and regard for women that they had learnt from teachings of the Gurus. Invariably, all the Sikh rulers kept the welfare of their subjects and the dispensation of justice and service to the people uppermost in their minds. They created a close identification with the people, they rejected the theory of divine right of kings, they started *langars*, they encouraged women in the participation of state business and they ruled in the name of their Gurus, as is reflected by the images on their coins.

In spite of many brutal obstacles, Sikhism prevailed and flourished. The institutions of *langar* and *Khalsa* were maintained and the Sikh values as well as the Sikh code of conduct were upheld. These endeavours were facilitated through key figures who provided the necessary guidance through their example, necessarily carrying the Guru's

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teachings forward to the Sikhs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as to their children and grandchildren. This period was a most crucial time in Sikh history when many forces were working to annihilate the new religion. The fact that they emerged from it, united, signifies the significance of the teachings in their hearts and signifies their success in embodying such Sikh values as equality, justice, humility, tolerance and forgiveness into their lifestyle practices.

In ending the line of succession of Sikh Guruship, Guru Gobind Singh's decision reflected his faith and trust in the strength of the word, as inscribed in the *Granth Sahib* and in the strength of Sikhs everywhere to uphold their beliefs in the face of adversity. The events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dramatically demonstrated that the teachings administered by the Guru's and their inscription into the sacred *Guru Granth Sahib* now resonated eternally in the hearts and minds of all Sikhs, in words as well as in their deeds. 

Angela MacDonald

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An English visitor spends.....

# A Day at Darbar Sahib



The flat, dusty streets of Amritsar, 250 miles northwest of Delhi, were choking with traffic and hawkers. The Golden Temple gates were almost within reach and the postcard-pushers knew it. I'd been polite so far, but now I waved my arms about and shouted, "Shoo!"

I walked into the temple compound, still swatting the air like a honey-coated Scot in summer, but suddenly the midge-like hawkers were gone. It was as though an invisible force were stopping them from entering. Glancing back, the most pesky postcard-seller caught my eye and briefly interrupted his Churchillian sulk with a smile.

I relaxed immediately.

At a busy row of benches, a greying lady in a rose-red sari mimed that I should take off my shoes and socks. She removed hers, too, then scooped up mine and hustled over to a long counter. Exchanging them for tokens, she hurried back and pressed a metal disc into my palm, closing my fingers around it as though it were precious. My grandparents used to do that when treating me with a five-pound note: I'd not thought of that for a long time.

She gathered in her sari and led me to a sawn-off oil barrel. It was full of headscarves. The few men not already wearing turbans were pausing to grab temporary head cover, a requirement for entry to the temple. My helper was more diligent, though – rejecting several scarves before teasing out the right one, *Ali Bongo*-style. It perfectly matched my shirt, and a tall Sikh boy with an insurmountable grin stopped to tie it on. My self-appointed chaperone single-clapped in delight.

Next, she led me to the entrance proper, where we paddled through a shallow pool to cleanse our feet. She held my elbow for balance and we climbed the steps together.

At the top, she leant against a column and proudly pushed me forward. There, framed by the white arch, was the 400-year-old Golden Temple of Amritsar. It was familiar to me from pictures in countless Punjabi restaurants, but in real life it was much more impressive. Shimmering in the heat, it loomed lightly, like a mirage. Its giant gilded strongbox glared bullion-brilliant and paradoxically appeared to float at the centre of a giant olive-green pool.

My companion sighed contentedly, folded her hands in goodbye and walked off along the marble poolside path.

Emerging from the inner sanctum, where Sikhs were filing past their holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, I walked by a formal grassy area. Having just bathed ceremonially in the pool, men were drying their long, long hair in the sun.

Further on, a crowd milled outside a large brick building, where a toothy man handed me a large metal *thali* tray, big and round as a hubcap. A young girl in western clothes said hello and asked me where I was from. She explained that this was the *langar* hall, where free meals are served round the clock.

It was a two-storey building the size of a Victorian school. Catching my bemused look, the girl launched into an explanation. "Fifty thousand people a day eat here, can you imagine? Guru Nanak, our founder, started it so that all

ALL BAZAR AMRITSAR & SMT LACHHMEVI  
PIRED ON 9/11 & 7/11 JUNE 1964 RESPECTIVELY

100/ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰ ਬੀਬੀ ਨਰਿੰਦਰ ਕੌਰ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਤਾਰਾ ਦੀ  
ਦੀ ਸੁਰ: ਬੀਬੀ ਹਰਬੀਸ ਕੌਰ ਸੁਰ: ਹਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰ  
ਦੀ ਸੁਰ: ਵਿਚ ਤਾ ਕੁੰਪਦੀਰ ਸਿੰਘਾਈ ਕੌਰ  
ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਿਸ਼ਨ ਹਸਪਤਾਲ ਜਲੰਧਰ ਨੇ  
100/ ਦੀ ਸੇਵਾ ਸੁਰ ਮੇਹਨ ਸਿੰਘਾਈ ਨਕੋਰ  
ਵਿਚ ਉਹਨਾ ਦੇ ਸਮੁਤਰ ਸੁਰ ਕੁਰਬਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ  
ਟਿੱਤਸਰੀ ਨਕੋਰ ਜਲੰਧਰ ਨੇ





Sikhs should eat together and show we do not agree with the caste system, like in Hinduism, and that men and women aren't kept separated, like in Islam."

"The people cooking and serving are volunteers, too", she continued. "All sorts of people, you'll see. We are calling it *sewa*. It is the voluntary work we are doing at a temple".

A bell rang and the heavy wooden doors opened. We shuffled inside and sat cross-legged on hessian mats, at least 1,000 people, I reckoned. There was a tug on my sleeve: two wily little kids with worn-through clothes and quick movements asked my name, shaking my hand energetically. Opposite, a portly gentleman with a magnificent beard adjusted his sword and bowed his head minutely in welcome.

Sumpreet, the sassy girl from outside, explained that the boys were poor and possibly came to eat every day, while the man was a rich businessman. A little shyly, she added: "I am studying for a geography degree, and come only when an exam is nearing and I am needing extra luck".

A line of servers scurried in from behind. They slug chapattis and dished out dhal with hilarious inaccuracy, but they were volunteers and already the next sitting was agitating at the door. It's the same in gurdwaras everywhere; rich and poor, young and old, men and women, all eating together. The food may be basic, but the symbolism is fine fusion.

Without question, the Golden Temple has all the grace and beauty of the Taj Mahal. It's not as big or as grand, but it is certainly as stunning. And while the Taj is a mausoleum, moribund except for the swarms of tourists and touts, the Golden Temple pulses with the energy of a thriving living community – the spiritual and temporal centre of the Sikh faith.

It is also visited by non-Indian or non-Sikh tourists, and there is an information office. After a cup of tea, information officer Subedar Dalbir Singh (Retired) led me on a free tour of the temple.

Mr Singh was an old man with a forthright chest and bow legs. He had served in the Indian Army before independence and referred to the Raj constantly, usually while staring into space, as though he were remembering a long-gone pet.

I followed him up the narrow steps to the museum, where walls were crammed with paintings. They were of the Sikh gurus and their followers, teaching, fighting and suffering, but mainly suffering.

In front of one particularly gruesome canvas, my guide scrunched up his face excitedly, like a schoolboy recounting an infamous scrap, saying that these three martyrs were tortured "very extensively, very

extensively indeed". Each "very" was projected loudly, like when a giant first appears in a bedtime story.

Another picture showed a Sikh being sliced in two with an axe – lengthways; and another panel brimmed with black-and-white photographs of Sikh youths who had been shot by the Indian Army. They were like school portraits, but madly macabre, and "very extensively" began echoing all around.

So much for blood and guts, bricks and mortar – I had a killer theological question that I wanted to air. So I asked: "What's the main difference between the Sikh salvation and the Christian heaven?" He thoughtfully twissled his thinning grey beard and fell silent for a long time. A very long time. Then, with eureka certainty, he said: "The Christian heaven has better facilities".

It was mid-afternoon when the heat finally won out and, overcoming my shyness, I "went local" and joined some other pilgrims snoozing in the dependable shade of a loggia.

Lying on the marble was refreshingly cool, like face-pressing a fridge door in a heat wave; and wafting over the water on a jasmine-scented breeze came hypnotic chanting amplified from the temple roof. I fell asleep.

Suddenly, a young boy in a white *lungi* was frantically prodding me awake, shouting: "The water is coming; the water is coming – look!". Advancing at a slow walk were at least 100 people. Sikhs were scoop-filling buckets from the edge of the tank, then passing them on to the next person in the chain. The pails swung across the crest of the crowd, water spilling and pails clattering. When they reached the last person on the row, the water was hurled over the marble. It was like watching a Sikh sorcerer's apprentice.

Then the crowd engulfed me, too. It was like a childhood summer – foot-stampingly happy days spent spraying friends with garden hoses. By the time a teenager tapped me on the shoulder and offered me a heavy pail, I was laughing aloud. "What on earth is going on?" I asked with a happy shrug.

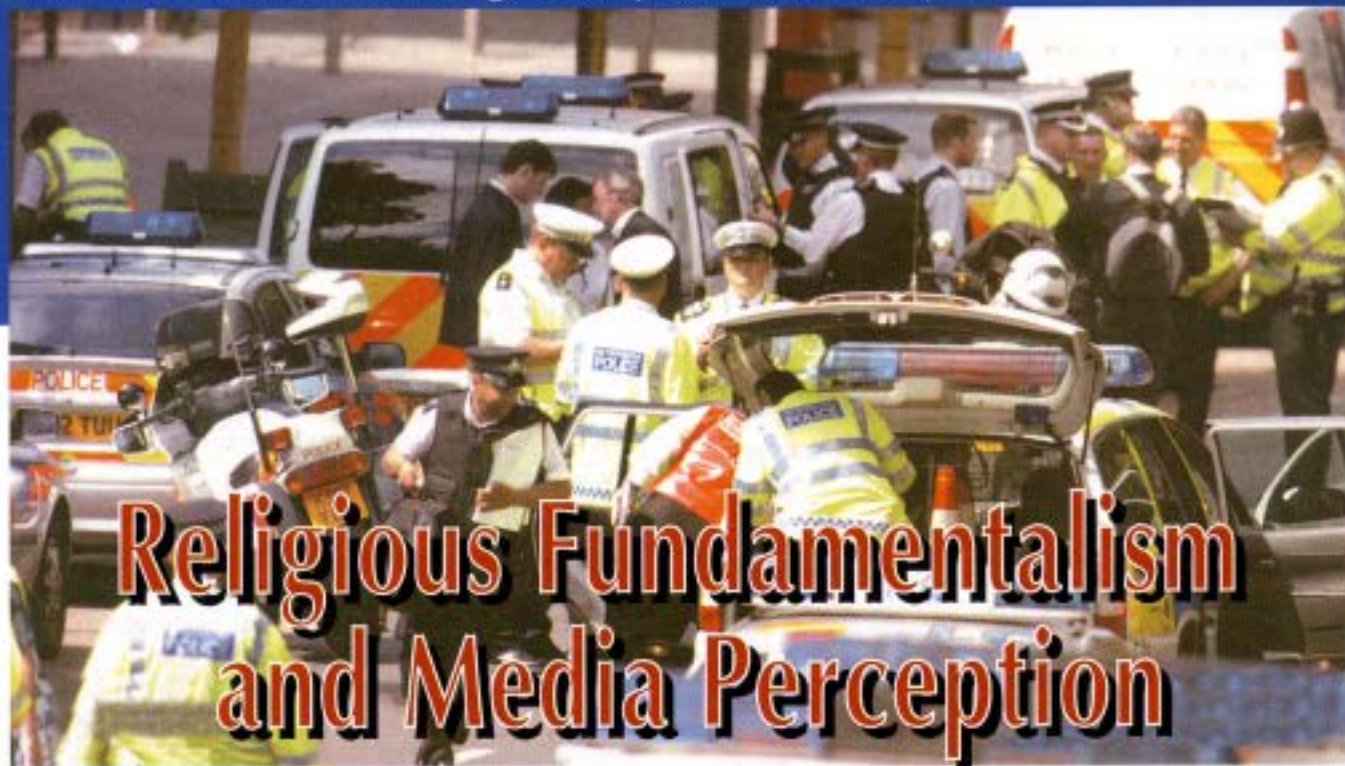
"We are cleaning the pathway. Here", he said, handing me a full bucket. I took the weight, then hesitated and looked around. This couldn't really be allowed, could it – in what is the Sikh equivalent of Canterbury Cathedral? I lunged forward like a first-timer in a bowling alley and the water arched through the air, splattering onto the white stone. The youth beamed, grabbed back the bucket, then rushed off to the pool.

This was a long way from my village church in Derbyshire. All I remembered from there was frustrated fidgeting and drowsy daydreaming.

What a shame that they never let us help wash the aisles! ☺

From: Times Online, UK





# Religious Fundamentalism and Media Perception

Religion in the Indian subcontinent was in a bad way at the time of Guru Nanak's birth a little over five centuries ago. In today's jargon, religion had been taken over by 'fundamentalists'. The majority Hindu community had forgotten basic ethical teachings and was sunk in rituals and superstition. To make matters worse, the religion was dominated by a priestly class called Brahmins, who taught that society was divided into castes, in which they and they alone, as the highest caste, could commune with God. They taught that caste or position in life, was determined by birth and lower castes were condemned to an inescapable life of misery.

To make matters worse, the country had been invaded by what we today would refer to as fundamentalist Muslims, bent on forced conversion to Islam. There was little dialogue between the two communities, only loathing and contempt. It was against this background that Guru Nanak preached his first sermon, in which he declared that in God's eyes, there was neither Hindu nor Muslim and by today's extension, neither Christian, Sikh nor Jew. That God was not in the least bit interested in religious labels, but in the way we lived. He taught that God was in the centre of all that exists, and that different religions were different ways of looking at

the same ultimate reality.

There are, of course, differences of emphasis and approach in our religious practice, but the Sikh view is that our different religions are overlapping circles of belief, with much in common.

This core ethical guidance contained in this common area of our different faiths, is extremely easy to state; much of it was covered in Jesus Christ's sermon on the mount. But, as we all know, it is also extremely difficult to live by. It cost Jesus Christ his life and it also cost the lives of two of the ten Sikh Gurus. Our ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur was martyred because of his courageous emphasis on the Sikh teaching of the need for tolerance and respect between religions.

The problem with religion is that we lesser human beings find it very difficult to live true to the high ideals of our religious teachings. It's easier to put the self first instead of others as required by religion and so on. So over the centuries, we perverse human beings have done other things in the name of religion and largely ignored essential ethical teachings: the fundamentals of belief.

It's easier to set religious guidance to beautiful words and music than to live that guidance. It's easier to bathe in supposedly holy waters than to immerse



ourselves in Godly teaching, it's easier to go on religious pilgrimages than to make life a pilgrimage in a quest for truth and justice for our fellow beings.

What concerns me is that these rituals, which start off as symbols or reminders of religious guidance, becomes surrogates for living the life taught by religion. To make things worse, questionable cultural practices are incorporated into this distorted view of religion, freezing religion into a culture of the past, that frequently has little relevance to today's times.

Sadly, it is not uplifting ethical teachings, but this distorted view of religion that is defended with such fanaticism by our different religious groupings. Trivial and questionable practices become sacred, to be defended at all costs.

This fanaticism is made worse by another human failing that we see in all walks of life. Lets call it Indarjit's law: 'that when two or more people find sufficient in common to call themselves 'us' they will strengthen their sense of unity by finding a 'them' to look down up on'. We strengthen our sense of identity as British by poking fun at the Italians, or as Italians, by calling the British insular. Or the British and Italians can get a sense of togetherness by making fun of the Germans or the French. Religions do much the same thing when they talk of others as heathens or infidels.

I've been talking of two major causes of religious fanaticism: undue allegiance to ritual and culture and a desire to show that we are better than others. This dangerous mix of passion and prejudice can, and all too often does, result in active hatred that can spontaneously combust into violent conflict. A responsible media could, at this point, try to calm things. But that's asking a lot. In reality, the media, in its desire for sensational headlines, or because of ignorance or deliberate bias, takes sides in an irrational and irresponsible way. Governments, for political reasons can and frequently do, add their own spin to conflict or potential conflict.

Let me give you a brief example from the suffering of my own community. Twenty years ago, the Indian government attacked the Sikh Golden Temple with tanks and missiles on one of the holiest days in the Sikh calendar.

It was like attacking the Vatican at Easter Christmas. The government failed to explain the insensitive timing. Thousands of innocent pilgrims died. The government said that some terrorists

were 'holed up' in the temple complex and had to be 'flushed out'. (Note the use of de-humanising language). Nor was it explained why all other major Sikh places of worship in Punjab were attacked at the same time. To date there has been no independent enquiry into the events.

The words 'Sikh' and 'terrorist' were sought to be linked together not only in India, but also in other parts of the world to show support for a large and important trading partner. The media had a field day with words, like terrorist, fundamentalist and fanatic used irresponsibly, in an interchangeable way to produce lurid and sensational headlines.

Loose use of such jargon has its affect on those in authority. It also has its comical side. After the attack on the Golden Temple, there was concern that conflict in India might have repercussions among people from the subcontinent living in Britain. Early one Sunday morning there was a knock on my door. I opened it to find two Scotland Yard police officers on the doorstep. They said they were visiting the homes of prominent Sikhs to discuss tensions in India. Pleased at the world prominent, I invited them in.

They asked me if I was an extremist or a moderate. I said I was extremely moderate. I give this example to show the absurdity of the use of meaningless labels by the media to colour our thinking and reaction. The role of the media should be to inform the public. The reality is that it often only adds to ignorance and prejudice.

Let me give another example: it was a week after the terrorist attacks in the United States. I was on my way to a meeting at the Commission for Racial Equality at Victoria in London. It was a time when feelings were running high against the Muslim community and anyone else who might be mistaken for a Muslim. I'd just come out of the underground station and saw two men talking together and eyeing me in a hostile way. Then, the older of the two, laughing at his companion's ignorance, pointed to my distinctive Sikh turban and declared, 'he's not a Muslim, he's a Hindu!' Ignorance has its own simple logic.

Bin Laden wore a turban; Bin Laden is a terrorist. Sikhs wear turbans so Sikhs must also be, at best, suspect. A turban wearing Sikh, who worked in one of the twin towers at the World Trade Centre, managed to escape moments before its collapse. He then found to his horror that he was being chased by an angry mob of enraged onlookers thirsty for



revenge. Another Sikh was shot dead at a petrol station in Arizona.

I tried to identify the main causes of religious conflict. There are ignorance and bigotry, both within religions and in general public understanding, made worse by the unhelpful influence of a media, generally more interested in banner headlines and greater circulation, than in informed reporting.

I would now like to suggest some necessary steps to tackle both religious bigotry and public ignorance. Only then can religion regain its true role as a positive force for good in the world of today.

The first is the urgent need for clarity of language. I've already mentioned some example of the way language is deliberately misused to create stereotypes. Another example is the use of the word 'terrorism'. We are constantly told today that we are engaged in a war against terrorism, or 'international terrorism'.

How can we fight anything so loosely defined? In talking about international terrorism, are we saying that the suicide bomber in Iraq and those who blew up a school in Russia belong to the same organisation and have an identical agenda?

The normal use of language suggests that terrorism is a tactic rather than an enemy. It is a repugnant tactic that, through violent action, aims to create fear in innocent and vulnerable members of the public. It can never be justified, whatever the real or perceived sense of injustice.

All religions should be challenged to condemn it without equivocation. The use of such terms as 'freedom fighters' to improve the image of those that carry out such atrocities, does not make them lesser atrocities. Those in our different religions that fail to make their position clear on this, also stand similarly condemned.

Another word that has been inverted and distorted by the media is 'fundamentalism'. Strictly this should mean one who believes in the fundamentals of their faith. I would be happy to be so identified with fundamental Sikh teachings on the equality of all human beings, including the full equality of women and the Sikh requirement to always stand up against injustice. But today the word has come to mean those that ignore core religious teachings and instead seek an agenda of superiority and hate. Used in this way it turns the English language on its head, but if we are clear about what we mean, I can live with it.

If the responsibility of the media is to be more objective and less biased in a way that combats prejudice and helps the understanding of real issues, there are also responsibilities of organised religion.

Over the centuries, leaders of religion have allowed their core teachings to be almost buried by new additions that blur the distinction between ethical teachings and questionable cultural practices.

Some drastic spring cleaning is clearly necessary to separate the two. Additionally, and I'm sorry for being so frank, the Old Testament religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam make real dialogue difficult by claiming exclusive relationships with God.

In former times, when most people in a country were all of the same religion, there was little harm in this. It helped as we discussed earlier, to create a degree of unity. It did not cause too much offense to talk of God 'being on our side'.

But we now live in different times. When people of different religions once lived thousands of miles away, today they can live next door and share the same citizenship. Today it is important to take a harder look at once perversely unifying talk of exclusivity.

If someone says he believes that his or her way, is the only way to God that is fine by me. That is his belief. It is the more arrogant statement that my way is the only way that needlessly rubbishes other religions and, in today's world, such a stance is neither necessary, nor helpful.

If religion is to move from a cause or a conflict between people to its real role of providing sane ethical guidance, we must urgently demolish unnecessary barriers between beliefs. If long-standing walls are demolished in an inner city redevelopment, we see the surrounding landscape in a totally new light.

In the same way, I as a Sikh, believe that if we remove arrogance and dates social customs and practices from organised religion, we will find much in common between our different religions; ethical teachings that are the key to peace and social justice in a world that seems to have lost its sense of direction. ☯

**Indarjit Singh OBE**

*Editor, The Sikh Messenger, U.K.*



# Gurdwaras in

Almost anywhere in the world one will find the 'Nishaan Sahib' distinctly seen atop many buildings, which testifies that the enterprising and intrepid Sikh community have their proverbial foothold there and congregate in the Gurdwara to offer prayers and service. Of course, in India the community is spread far and wide, some Gurdwaras predating their settlements, many of which commemorate historical episodes in the lives of the Gurus or the community. The vicinity of the Gurdwara is typified by an amalgam of fragrances of radiant marigold blended with *mogra* and incense. From dawn one can listen to strains of the *japji* (morning prayer) and in the evenings there is the *rehraas*, while at most other times melodious strains of kirtan waft into soothe and balm everyday life.

Every historic Gurdwara is equally revered and bespeaks a saga which commemorates an episode connected with the Gurus and their past or present disciples or the challenges that the community has endured. As the book in review enunciates, all Gurdwaras are equally dear to the Sikh but the Golden Temple is the spiritual capital of the Sikhs and the symbol of their faith and resilience. The Golden Temple is today a global landmark on the itinerary of most visitors, irrespective of their religious inclinations or nationality. The edifice has an overwhelming impact on devotees with simultaneous elevation to sublime divinity. Even though there are entire volumes devoted to the Durbar Sahib, yet it cannot be glossed over nor its captivating pictures. The *Gurdwaras of India* have been covered replete with accounts of their history and architecture. In including the *Gurdwaras of Pakistan*, Dr. Mohinder Singh has enriched the content of the volume accentuated by Sandeep Shanker's impressive photography, particularly some of the striking photographs like that of Gurdwara Nankana Sahib which is given on the cover.

The roller coaster relationships between India and Pakistan are hopefully now beyond mere rapprochement, with concrete plans and pacts being signed owing to tremendous endeavours which are being made on both sides of the Radcliffe Line. Political relations between the two countries reflect an inconsistent graph, sometimes nose diving and ending in hostilities, yet through all these vicissitudes one vital reality has endured and survived, the

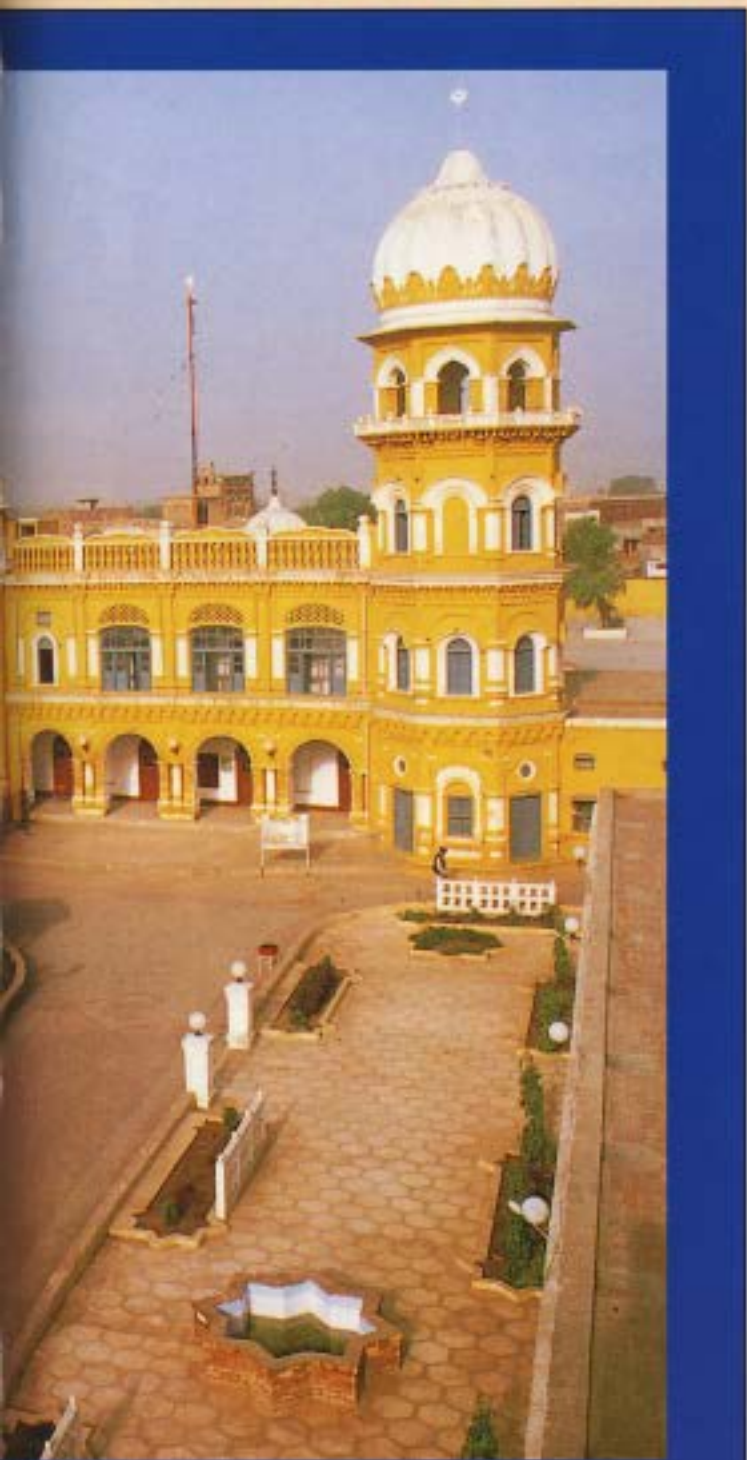
Nankana Sahib, in Pakistani Punjab.



Text by Mohinder Singh;  
Photographs by Sandeep Shankar.



# India and Pakistan



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National Institute of Punjab Studies.

priceless and eternal linkage to Sikhism's most holy Gurdwaras across the borders leading to people-to-people contact.

In 1947, when the Radcliffe line was drawn, traumatically dividing the Punjabs, the Sikhs had left with heavy hearts as they were forced to abandon their lands and precious spiritual heritage. In fact, they were leaving behind substantial religious legacy, particularly the Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib near Lahore and Panja Sahib at Hasan Abdal, near Rawalpindi. The restoration of cultural ties and trade links are of immense significance for Indians, particularly for the Sikhs which means easier access to their spiritual legacy and is of paramount importance. *Jathas* have continued their pilgrimages twice a year but a religious sojourn bereft of tension would accentuate the succour attained. As the atmosphere of peace prevails, it augurs well for the Sikhs of the sub-continent when more promises are on the horizon including direct bus services from Amritsar to Nankana Sahib.

Evolution of the Gurdwara began with Guru Nanak Deviji when he started the institution, literally meaning "the Guru's portal" and this was initially known as *dharamsal*. The instant image of contemporary Gurdwaras which the mind conjures is that of a white marble structure with domes and copulas brilliantly contrasted against a clear blue sky. Its external distinguishing mark is the *Nishaan sahib*, the Sikh flag of saffron colour flying high, day and night throughout the seasons of the year.

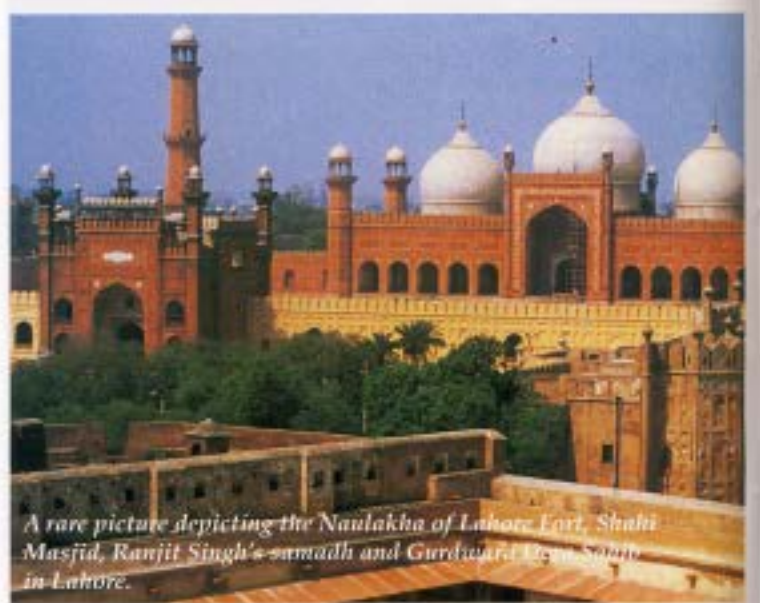
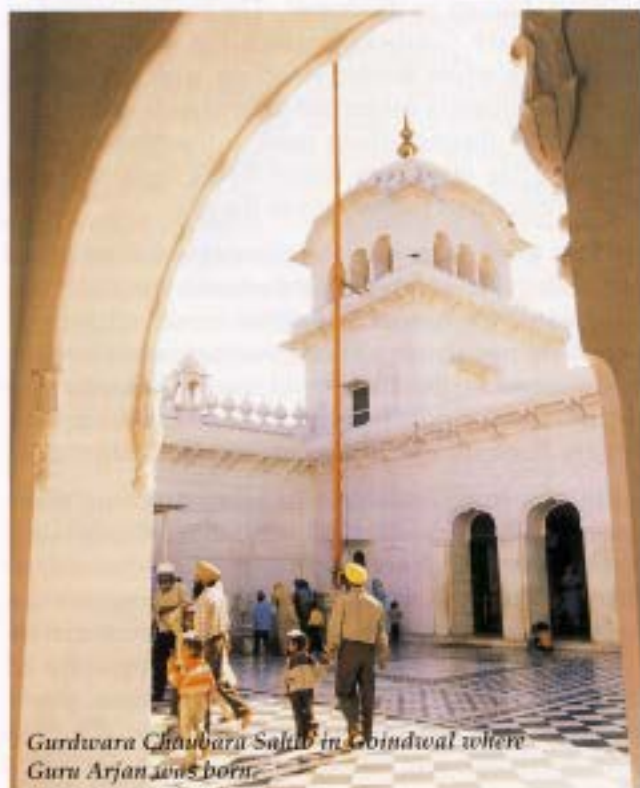
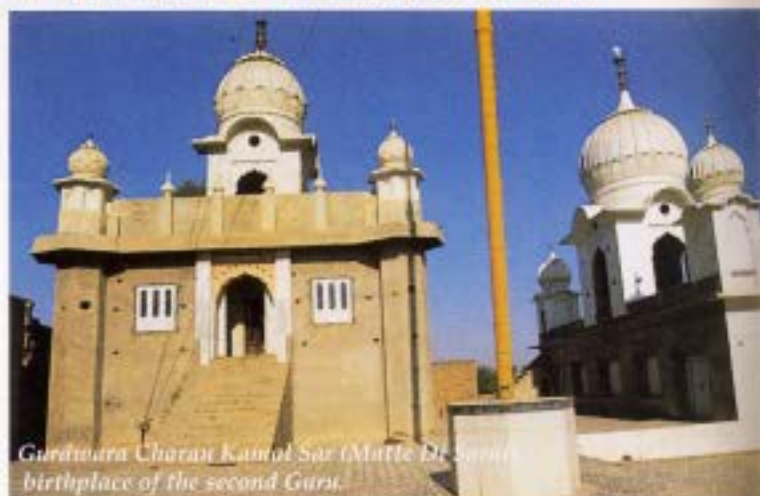
The gurdwara has four doors on four sides indicating its openness for devotees from all four directions, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex. This particular volume further enriches our knowledge of the history of various Gurdwaras in India and Pakistan as well as intermeshing the historical spiritual traditions of the community.

In this commendable effort in publishing these series on Punjab's history and culture, I only wish the Forward had been written differently for each of the varied themes, encapsulating what the particular volume endows. Nevertheless, this minor matter is overwhelmed by the arresting photography of Sondeep Shanker which captures the solace, peace and tranquility that the Gurdwaras provide. ☯

Dr. Gurpreet Maini



# IMAGES FROM THE BOOK "GURDWARAS IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN"







*Gurdwara Baba Atal, built in the memory of Baba Atal at Amritsar.*



*Entrance to Darbar Sahib at Tarn Taran.*



*A Gurdwara in Guwahati, the capital of Assam in eastern India.*



*Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh) was born in Patna Sahib. The historic gurdwara of Patna Sahib which has been declared as takhat, has relics associated with the Tenth Master.*



# The Sikh Diaspora and Distinctive Names

## THE VITALITY OF KEEPING "SINGH" & "KAUR"

Having lived in the United States for over three decades and while following the established Sikh practices, I have been fairly convinced that there is no need to sacrifice one for the other, as both are mutually complementary. Obviously such a journey is not laden with roses and there are definite road blocks en-route in view of the unique Sikh identity. However, with a certain



degree of character and conviction one could easily overcome these hurdles and follow the requirements of the Sikh faith in harmonious relationship with the western culture around it.

**Conviction:** I didn't wake up one morning with this view; rather it has gradually crept upon me based on my experience over a period of time. I am also cognizant of the fact that the culture of a minority group living in a multicultural society definitely gets modified under the influence of majority regardless of the liking or disliking of the former. After having spent half of my life in India as a member of the minority group and then migrating to the USA, I am further convinced that such a card in fact could be used to the advantage of this group.

One needs to recognise the fact that western culture was well established in North America prior to the landing of various minority groups on its shores. Immigrants came with their own baggage of a distinct culture putting them at some disadvantage. The difficult question that needs to be addressed is what exactly and how much of the back home culture and life style should immigrants voluntarily give up in order to avoid being labelled as exotically overbearing? In order to tackle the differences between two widely apart lifestyles, one that of the indigenous majority culture and the other that of an immigrant, requires careful and well-thought of approach. In the case of Sikhs it becomes even more critical in as much as not only does it touch the very root of being, becoming and staying a Sikh, but their culture and faith seems to be intertwined to the uninitiated. My answer to this difficult question is very simple. Those customs and traditions that are prevalent in the host-land, but are not in direct contradiction to the true intrinsic values of minority faith, should be accepted and adopted. While doing so one must make sure that the fundamentals of one's faith are not altered. Awareness of such a distinction goes a long way in allaying the subconscious – but true – about "de-identification" in the minds of people of minority groups especially Sikhs while they subtly incorporate the process of "assimilation" in the local majority culture and rightly so.

**Caution:** There is no denying the fact that Sikhism in itself is a full fledged and sovereign religion. The ill-conceived notion amongst some people that Sikhs are often at odds with western culture might not carry much weight if seen through a probing eye. In fact this perception seems to have culminated as a result of lack of dissemination of proper information about the true fundamentals of the Sikh faith, not only to others but amongst the Sikhs themselves. In order to rectify this situation, certain corrective steps must be initiated by the Sikh Diaspora itself with an open and informed mind. While there are several



issues that one could ponder upon, I would primarily limit my focus here on one issue that I was recently confronted with and it relates to Sikh names.

Sikhs have their own styles of "first names" that are given by parents at the birth of a child or some times thereafter, depending upon the circumstances. At the time of *Namkaran*, the first name is always chosen starting with a letter that happens to be the same as the first letter of the *Hukam* (Reading of a *Shabad*) from random opening of Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji. This in fact is a well established requirement of the Sikh religion. But to the best of my knowledge as far as the first name itself goes, there does not seem to be an ordained code. Instead parents usually try to base it on many different variables, such as Sikh spirituality, chivalry, Sikh history, traditions, prevalent culture or simple imitations of what others have been doing for no reasons at all. A given name or the "First Name" of a Sikh is followed by Singh (a lion) for a baby boy and Kaur (a princess) for a baby girl, again as per the ordained codes of Sikh faith and as such it needs to be adhered to. It makes the Sikhs feel proud and unique while it also helps them in maintaining their identity. The choice of this first name is what is under discussion here.

At the time of selection of the "first or given, name" the newly arrived immigrant parents, not fully conversant with western culture or its subtle intricacies, often decide to settle on a name based on back-home culture that might be too long, alien and difficult to pronounce for the indigenous population in which they have decided to live. Coupled with an alien background, skin colour and other distinct characteristics, it could haunt them later on, in as much as such names put the deserving Sikh children at a subtle disadvantage at the time of seeking admissions in professional colleges or competitive jobs. Obviously, there is not a whole lot one could do about the background, skin colour or other characteristics. Yet one could help ease the situation somewhat by paying a little attention in the selection of the first names. A lengthy and difficult to-pronounce (or spell) "first or given name", often leads children and their parents to avoid using such lengthy names. In fact such names end up being left reserved for official use only on legal documents, i.e. driver licences and social security numbers, etc. In their place, short, and easy to pronounce "nick names", having nothing to do with the original full names, start taking over, a subtle yet sure untoward by-product of such a dilemma. It is a phenomenon that seems to be fairly common and well known amongst Indians both back home and here in the USA. Unfortunately it doesn't serve the intended purpose of having a "full name".

**Social Need:** In my way of thinking there is a way for Sikh parents to fulfil both these obligations, i.e. that of the religious needs as well as the societal perspective around them. When it comes to maintaining the ordained requirement of our faith, there could not be a second view. One should and must follow the established guideline in seeking help from Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji in as far as the first letter of the first name is concerned and try not to tread on the domain of the Sikh religious guidelines. The first name certainly ought to be followed by Singh or Kaur as the case might be. But so as far as the first name itself is concerned, I see no point in choosing such first names that are too long and difficult to pronounce for the American community at large. I do not however, intend to imply that one has to sacrifice the Sikh character of the first names. There are many beautiful first Sikh names out there, containing not more than three to five letters, with their roots ingrained in the Sikh history, culture, faith, traditions and language having full association with our Sikh scriptures, yet simple enough for westerners to pronounce. Additionally one should attempt to spell them within the ground rules of American-English based on the input of one's American-born friends.

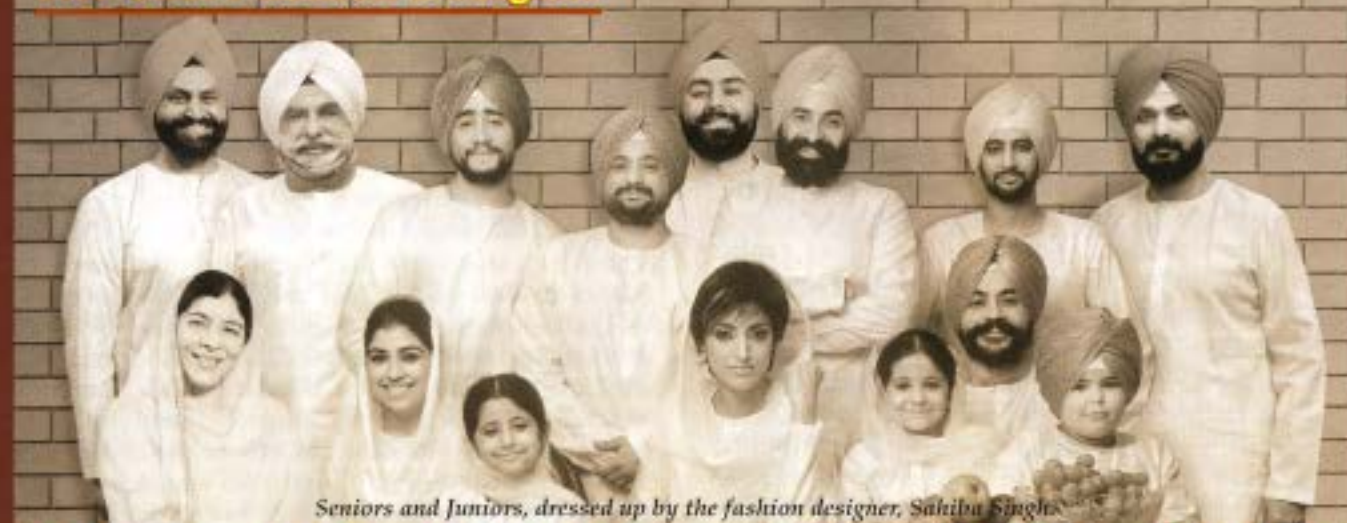
As far as I can imagine, a majority of children born and raised in western countries ultimately will live here amongst the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic societies. Some might question, then why could not we make this society learn about our names like we do for theirs? Certainly, it is a nice way to justify our ego, and I sincerely hope that such were possible but, unfortunately, the ground realities do not tend to support such wishful thinking. A simple observation of the facts will bring home the truth. And the truth is that discrimination is bound to persist in any multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community regardless of the pious upfront put forth by the majority of a given country. One only needs to turn one's eyes to the pages of past history and look at the fate of other minorities in this country, or elsewhere in the world, including the not-so-distant events that happened in the 1980s in India.

Certain things in life never change. Therefore, cautious awareness and introduction of a fresh thought process that makes life easier for the Sikh diaspora, within the established limits of Sikh faith, should be fully encouraged so as to help our future generations live their lives to their fullest without violating any such boundaries. ☞

Dr Jaswant Singh Sachdev, MD  
Phoenix, Arizona, USA



## The Sikh Fashion Designer



Seniors and Juniors, dressed up by the fashion designer, Sahiba Singh

# CREATING A NICHE

Many years ago when Sahiba Singh put her creative talent to work for dressing up her mother, sister and herself for a close family wedding, she was least aware that it was germinating the seed of her future calling. "It was my cousin's wedding and I wanted to wear something exclusive. I was least fascinated with the clothes available over the counter. I thought they lacked class. And designer clothes were not within my reach", said Sahiba. A natural affinity to fashion led her to experiment with designing, just for a lark. "Believe me, those clothes were so well appreciated that at the next family wedding, everybody was placing orders with me", beamed an overwhelmed Sahiba. Her creative awakening had taken place; there was no stopping her now.

### A designer in the making

A professional course in fashion designing from SNDT College gradually shaped Sahiba's career, though family problems forced her to leave it midway. But, her creative streak was on fire and she found it difficult to resist the urge to design. Sahiba decided to hone creative instincts by joining the production house of internationally acclaimed designers, Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla. Within a period of six months, the hands-on experience made her adept at the finer nuances of fashion designing. "Abu and Sandeep are the ultimate fashion gurus; they shoulder the credit

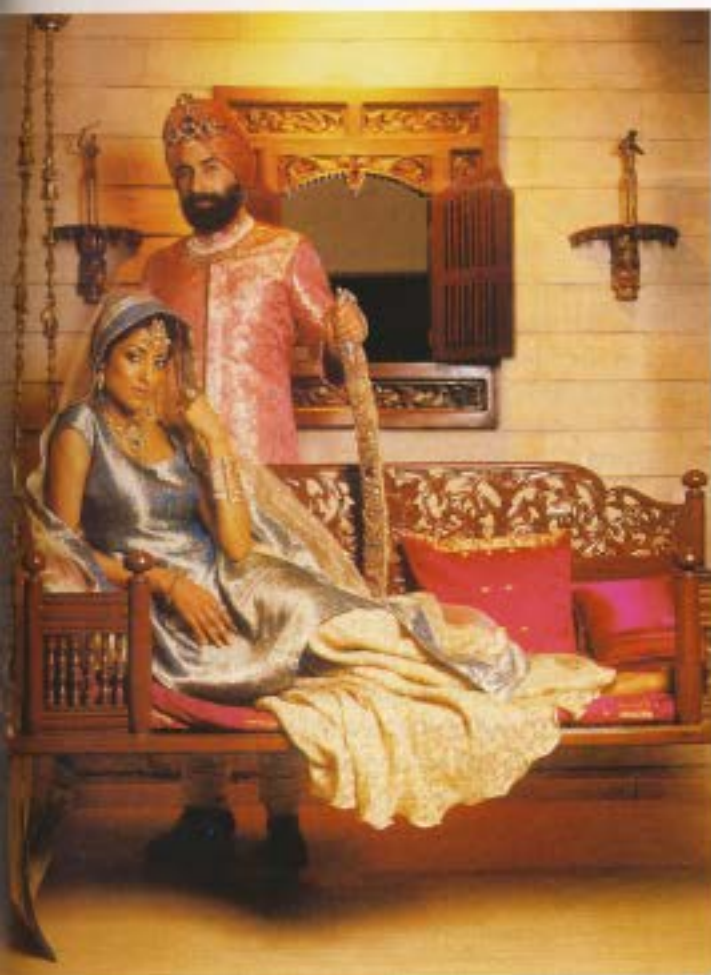
for reviving contemporary styles. Their designs are simple yet classy and have an element of tradition in it and they are extremely particular about finishing and styling. Their clothes have truly inspired me and the same tastes have gradually sunk into my psyche". Having gathered thorough working knowledge in their design studio, Sahiba experimented with similar cuts, styles and silhouettes. Her next aim was the launching of her own line. With an investment of Rs 25,000 in sewing machines, raw materials (fabrics, threads, motifs, embellishments) and a team of *karigars* and masters, she started her operations in full bloom. Hard work and determination soon paved the way to success and before she knew it, the label 'Sahiba Singh' saw the light of day.

Her clothes have a definite touch of elegance and timeless glamour. Her exceptional sense of style and aesthetics talks of her creative opulence. A cut here, a stitch there and she can breathe life into any fabric. Sahiba is fond of crepes, organzas, silks and jamevar reshams and loves to use heavy *zardosi*, rich embroidery, intricate *chikan* work and other embellishments to cast a look of splendour and elegance. For Sahiba, satisfying the customer is most important. She prefers customised designing for her clients. "I like to study the individual's personality, her lifestyle, the occasion she wishes to wear the outfit to, her choice of colour and other details before giving shape to a design".



## Spreading her creative wings

Fashion exhibitions gave Sahiba ample scope for growth and innovation. Through word-of-mouth publicity, her designs soon became a rage with people. At her first exhibition on georgettes, all the pieces displayed were sold immediately; she even bagged scores of more orders from her customers. The second exhibition on swarovski was also a big hit. "One of the pieces in the second exhibition was somewhat on the lines of what Nicole Kidman wore in 'Moulin Rouge'. The *bandhani* outfit was heavily embellished with swarovski all over the neck; it left no room for wearing a neckpiece. A lot of people took fascination to it", describes Sahiba whose creative streak coaxed her to branch out to other styles too – semi-formals, Indo-westerns, bridal trousseaus et al.



Jaspal Singh Sehgal and model Jessey Randhawa, with regal countenance, grace and elegance strike a classic pose.

She is planning a fashion show which, she believes, will make her a designer of international repute.



Brothers S. Narinder Singh and Bikram Singh Bawa represents modern day entrepreneurs of the Punjab who have reached the pinnacle of success.

This young Sikh lady has created a niche in yet another category – designing for her own community. "I have a passion for designing for Sikhs", she smiles. "Belonging to the same community, I can feel the pulse of their tastes, styles, preferences. A lot of Sikhs all over India and even the ones in Canada, England, Australia and New York do not know where to look for typical Sikh fashion. I find immense scope in this sector. There's so much that one can explore". Apart from *salwar-kameezes*, *churidar-pyjamas*, *achkans*, etc., she designs *pagadis*, *kirpans*, hair accessories, armlets and *panjabs*. "I can do a complete make-over for a Sikh boy or girl by dressing them up in their traditional attires", she says with conviction, and continues in the same breath, "Recently, I worked on a calendar that featured traditional Sikh garments in various forms and styles". Sahiba has dressed up pop singers like Malkit Singh too for shows and videos.

## Treading a different path

Following the Sikh trail was not smooth sailing since Sahiba's father was initially far from supportive. "I garnered complete support from my mother, but convincing dad was tough. According to him, Sikh fashion had no scope. Nobody had experimented in this area, not even Sikh designers like JJ Valaya. He said most Sikhs were hesitant to experiment. The same colours and styles were followed for many generations. He therefore considered it a big risk and



wanted me to play safe by doing the regular indo-western stuff, which was constantly in demand". But Sahiba had other plans. She wanted to revolutionise Sikh fashion by introducing designer kirpans and *pagdis* that looked funky and stylised. "Why should we deprive Sikhs of good styles and colourful clothes?" she questions.

In a matter of few years, Sahiba has gained absolute mastery in her art; today, her designer kirpans are her special brand of creativity. She has even started theme designing for Sikh houses. "Sikhs legend the kirpans as a mark of spiritual significance. I design these kirpans with embroidery, motifs and other embellishments and match them with the furniture or walls to give it a special theme. I also design the cloth that is used to cover the Guru Granth Sahib. Recently, I designed the Babaji's beed in a Sikh house. I got the beed made in golden wrought iron and matched it with golden polka dots on the wall behind", she started.

Sahiba is very fond of Indian history and its lineage and has done immense research on raja-maharajas, their styles, their clothes, jewellery, and so on. "History is my eternal muse. I went to Patiala some time back and was so fascinated with the museums and palaces there". The huge painting of Duleep Singh, the youngest son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, hanging on the wall of her studio, speaks volumes for Sahiba's bent towards the subject. Her intricate *zardosi* and swarovski work brings the portrait to life. "That's my favourite corner", she says pointing at the wall. "I derive immense inspiration whenever I sit there and design".

### Master designer

In spite of her ornate touch and opulent styling, Sahiba claims that her clothes can be worn anytime, anywhere and are reasonably priced. Though she is now popular for her Sikh fashion designs, her semi-formal and western lines are equally sought after. Throwing light on her unique designing and style, she mentions, "I experiment with paisleys, flowers, abstract motifs as well as *zardosi* and swarovski on western clothes to give it an indo-western look. My designer sarees are also not the typical ones. The chiffon and georgette fabrics with halter-neck cholis make them cool and wearable. I love using rich tones like maroons, browns and firozis".

At 22, Sahiba J Singh already has her own fashion label (called *Sahiba J Singh*) and a niche



*Sahiba Singh, the master designer.*

area of competence – Sikh fashion. Currently in the final year of graduation in sociology at St Xavier's College, the young designer says that her sense of pride in the Sikh identity motivates her to work on traditional Sikh attire and to give it a contemporary feel. At her studio in Santa Cruz, Sahiba says, "Many youngsters from the community are moving away from their roots because they think the 'traditional' look is unattractive. I want to change this notion by making the best clothes for them!

The designer in Sahiba has her creative peaks and lows too. Her artistic temperament finds the best expression when she's angry. "I take out my fury on paper by sketching. I'm a total night bird. I get a rush of ideas at three or four at night. Many a time, ideas also keep flowing in when I'm jogging", says the designer who's also fond of breeding horses. "We're no less smart than the west. Indians are increasingly getting fashion conscious. *Generation next* is open to change and experimentation. The Indian fashion scenario is fast growing and has a bright future ahead", she talks like a thoroughbred designer. ☐

*Rachna Viridi*

[Adapted from "New Woman"]



# Letters to the Editor

## Good morning to the faith !

Sir,

As a new member I am writing to introduce myself. I am a young English Christian lawyer working for the Church of England in London. I am hoping soon to start my training as a minister in the Church. As part of my spiritual growth I have been reading and trying to find out more about the different faith traditions in our modern society in Britain – both to be more aware of the different paths to and images of God in Britain today and to grow more fully in the love of God and my neighbour. I have gained an academic interest in Islam and the Vedic scriptures of the Hindu tradition. But nothing could have prepared me for the inspiration and beauty I have found in the story of the Sikh Gurus and their divinely inspired sacred scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib. I find their universal but non exclusive vision of God deeply attractive. Guru Nanak's concept of there being no Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian or Jew but only routes to God, has spoken deeply to my heart.

Through a tentative note left on an English Sikh website I have received many wonderfully generous responses and kind offers of help from a very special community who have so much to offer our troubled and fractious society in recognising God and serving the world around us. Guru Nanak's revelation of the God in Creation has enriched my understanding and reading of the holy scriptures of my own faith tradition, the Bible. So I wish to explore more this clear path to the one God and was kindly invited by one of your members to join your group to learn more about the Sikh Diaspora and its way of life in Britain and America today. I hope you will not mind if I just soak up your stimulating conversation for a while before I feel confident enough to offer any comments myself. Please do not read any lack of interest into this on my behalf, just good manners as I feel my way and learn more from you.

At this stage I have only a very small observation as a non Sikh on the forensic and challenging discussion I have been watching on Gurbani and translation of the holy work of the living Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib. Although an educated man, linguistics is not one of my God given gifts and it has

only really been through the rich English translation of Manmohan Singh that I have been able to immerse myself in the beautiful spiritual poetry and hymns of the Guru Granth Sahib. That said, as a Christian I am well aware of the dangers in translating holy scripture into new vernacular languages – where meaning and power can easily be distorted or lost. In recent years I have sadly witnessed even authorised and approved translations of the Bible being corrupted through the clear and deliberate intention of some translators to move thoughts and ideas in either a more conservative or liberal direction than the original divinely inspired authors intended.

Yours,

James McKeran  
London UK

## Sikh Theology & Gurmat Sangeet

Sir,

I am studying for a PhD in Sikh Theology at the University of Birmingham with my particular specialist subject being "The Development of Early Sikh Thought". However, another passion of mine is Gurmat Sangeet. I do kirtan with the *taoos* and am learning classical sarangi from the renown maestro Ustad Surjit Singh. My brother is a senior student of Pandit Sarda Shai. We have a small jatha of around 5-6 people who all play *tantee saaj* (mainly *dilrabas*), but stopped playing the *baja* around 5 years ago and currently have around 25 students all learning *Dilraba* and Gurmat Sangeet, *bani raags* etc. We do kirtan with *parchar* in English, this has proven tremendously popular here in the UK. At some point we would like to tour India, mainly Delhi and the Punjab, to do the same, i.e. kirtan on *tantee saaj* with *parchar*.

Gurmat Sangeet is a strong passion of mine and I would like to write an article or two on the subject. As a starter, I have a couple of articles on various *raags* published on our web site: [www.gurmatsangeet.org](http://www.gurmatsangeet.org). A *siri raag* article you may find interesting is at <http://gurmatsangeet.org/content/view/28/51>.

Harjinder Singh Lallie  
Programme Leader  
University of Derby, UK



## Mother of All Apologies

Sir,

Dr. Manmohan Singh made a dramatic gesture by apologising in the Rajya Sabha during August 2005, "on behalf of the government" for the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in November 1984. Now the country can go back to business as usual, and given the government's record in such matters, the victims will again be forgotten and none of the Congress leaders will go to jail. The PM's apology would have had some meaning if he had apologised when the Nanavati Commission report was first presented in the Lok Sabha when he tried to absolve the party of any wrong doing. It would have been meaningful if he had taken the initiative to reveal the report in February 2005 and not on the last day of the six month legal period. In order to understand the gravity of the situation, a comparison with Chile is worth making; the Chilean junta killed 3,000 people over ten years whereas the secular Congress Party operatives killed the same number of Sikh boys and men in three days.

During the Rajya Sabha speech he repeated the same statement made in the Lok Sabha speech that the commission did not blame any senior leader for the killings and again made a point of protecting Rajiv Gandhi. Somebody needs to tell our supposedly honest and decent PM that there is such a thing called dereliction of duty. The leaders were guilty of negligence to say the least. We know that (a) the army was not called in for 72 hours and not deployed for another 24 hours, (b) a Sikh infantry battalion that was called in from Meerut by the local commander on 31 October 1984 was not allowed to enter Delhi for several hours, and then sent to the barracks the next day as it tried to rescue a few Sikh families, and (c) when I.K. Gujral, General J.S. Aurora and S. Patwant Singh went to see Home Minister N. Rao at his house on 1 November, they found him twiddling his thumbs, the least concerned about his own citizens being butchered. Finally, in an article in the *New Yorker* (19/26 June, 2000), on his return from India, Salman Rushdie quotes his attorney, Vijay Shankardass who went to see his friend Rajiv Gandhi and demanded that he do something to stop the killings. Shankardass found Rajiv's reaction shocking.

Manmohan Singh is a well-read man. It is incomprehensible to think that he is not fully aware

of the facts. Interestingly, although he has been member of the Congress Party since 1991, he has been strangely silent about this issue. He and his fellow Sikh Congress Party leaders remind us of the Communist Party leaders in the Eastern bloc countries; their allegiance was to Moscow and not to their own people. His apology was a mere smoke screen, to salvage his battered reputation in the Sikh community and to restore the image of the Punjab Congress Sikh leaders who have been hiding behind the party high command for the last 21 years – as if a corrupt organisation has any moral values!

*Rajindar Singh*  
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## Who ordered the carnage?

Sir,

Twenty one years and nine inquiry commissions later, the Congress has, for the first time, accepted complicity in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots by facilitating the resignations of Jagdish Tytler from government and of Sajjan Kumar from a semi-government post.

The controversy has been handled horribly by the Congress. The party should have dropped Tytler in a regular mini reshuffle. Instead, the Congress accepted guilt, sacked its minister and apologised, while its allies got all the credit. In fact the allies foiled all Congress attempts to brazenly whitewash the Nanavati Report. The Communists threatened to vote for the Opposition-sponsored adjournment motion, and the media built up pressure on the party, forcing Congress capitulation.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's apology is soothing but not sufficient. Indira Gandhi's assassins were hanged, the Khalistani terrorists are either dead or in prison. But the brain behind the Delhi massacre of 3,500 Sikhs is yet to be identified and punished. The practice of deeming resignations as final punishment and taking guilt to the logical conclusion of imprisonment must be changed. Tytler and Sajjan Kumar must be expelled from the Congress. Thereafter exemplary punishment must be given to them.

But, above all, their boss must be unmasked!

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